Table of Contents

1. Prologue
2. Chapter 1
3. Chapter 2
4. Chapter 3
5. Chapter 4
6. Chapter 5
7. Chapter 6
8. Chapter 7
9. Chapter 8
10. Chapter 9
11. Chapter 10
12. Chapter 11
13. Chapter 12
14. Chapter 13
15. Chapter 14
16. Chapter 15
17. Chapter 16
18. Chapter 17
19. Chapter 18
20. Chapter 19
21. Chapter 20
22. Chapter 21
23. Chapter 22
24. Chapter 23
25. Chapter 24
26. Epilogue

Prologue

This is our serious fanfic that we have been promising! Prologue written by Crazystar! Edited by Lightning.

A few clear droplets of rain hit Pebblescar on the head, distracting him as he tried to focus on catching fish. The RiverClan warrior shook his head with frustration, then stared at the water. The dark gray tom's green eyes spotted a sleek shape in the water, but as his paw flashed out to make the kill, thunder crackled behind him. Startled, he lost his balance and tumbled into the stream.

The icy chill of the water penetrated through to his bones. With a few strong, experienced strokes, he began to ascend. He surfaced, spluttering, and paddled his way to shore. A soaked Pebblescar hauled himself back onto dry land and shivered. As he sat on the bank, panting, he heard laughter behind him. Pebblescar whipped around to see none other than the arrogant, new warrior, Cinderclaw.

"What are you trying to do, catch greencough? As if sitting out in the rain was not mouse-brained enough, you take a swim in the river at the end of leaf-fall? Even the kits in the nursery have more common sense!" Cinderclaw hissed.

"Who do you think you are, my mother?" Pebblescar snarled. "I fell in the river by accident, and I'm out in the rain because, well . . ."

Cinderclaw rolled his eyes. "Because you were too incompetent to catch any fish while it was sunny. You had plenty of time before it started raining, yet you caught nothing. Care to explain?"

"I don't have to explain myself to you!" Pebblescar huffed.

Cinderclaw chuckled. "You don't need to. I can figure out why."

Pebblescar glared at the new warrior. "Then why?"

"Because you were daydreaming about Minnowfrost again," Cinderclaw replied. "So while you were staring off into space being useless, you wasted perfectly good sunshine. And now it's nearly sundown, and it's raining, and you still have absolutely nothing!"

Pebblescar's neck fur bristled. "Yeah, and what did you do today that was so great?"

Cinderclaw lifted his chin with pride. "I led the dawn patrol along the ShadowClan border, and fought off some of those fox-hearted thieves who call themselves warriors. They were hunting on our side of the border, but we drove them off!"

Pebblescar sighed. "Good for you, Cinderclaw, that's good for you."

"Considering that the kits in the nursery can contribute more to this Clan than you, I'm pretty sure you don't stand a chance with Minnowfrost. Now me, I'm a different story!" Cinderclaw remarked.

Rage burned in Pebblescar's stomach. A red haze flashed in front of his eyes as he lashed out with his claws. He felt himself slice through the soft flesh on Cinderclaw's throat, and then, still seething with fury, he shoved Cinderclaw's body into the river and watched it float away.

As the anger subsided, it was quickly replaced by horror. "What have I done?" Pebblescar muttered to himself. Then, he shook his head swiftly. It was what that nasty Cinderclaw deserved! The thought of Minnowfrost falling for that arrogant tom made him angry, especially since he boasted too much.

Pebblescar blinked a few times, washed his claws in the river, and padded back into camp.

"Where's your prey, Pebblescar?" asked Troutpool, the RiverClan deputy. "You've been gone all day!"

Pebblescar shook his head, still feeling dazed. "I just couldn't focus today, I'm sorry. I didn't catch anything."

"That's ridiculous!" Troutpool hissed. "I'm going to put you back on apprentice duties for a quarter-moon! This better not happen

again!"

Pebblescar nodded, too astonished that he had murdered a cat from his own Clan to argue with the deputy. He made his way into the warriors den and somehow drifted off into sleep. The last thing he saw was the pounding rain.

"Hey, Pebblescar, you're on the dawn patrol! Wake up!" a familiar, irritating voice called from the outside of the warriors den.

Pebblescar scrambled out of his nest, unable to believe what he was hearing. It was Cinderclaw, waiting impatiently for him in the center of the camp! "Hurry up, or it'll be moonhigh by the time we get there!" the new warrior called.

It took a few moments for Pebblescar to process things as he blinked the sunlight out of his eyes. Then he gasped, staring at the tom in disbelief. "Cinderclaw!"

Cinderclaw sighed in frustration. "No, it's your mother. Yes, it's me! What's wrong with you, Pebblescar?"

Was murdering Cinderclaw . . . a dream?

Chapter 1

Pebblescar stared at his paws. His claws were outstretched, stained with blood and fur like he had remembered it. That moment where he felt an extreme emotion to an extent where he had to act, where he had turned against a Clanmate. These were the claws that had killed Cinderclaw, and yet . . .

"What's wrong with you, Pebblescar?" snapped Cinderclaw with frustration. The tom's ears were outlined by the rising red sun, casting a dim yet disturbing light into his eyes. "It's almost past dawn, and we're on the patrol! Come on, we are about to leave," he urged.

Pebblescar couldn't find his words. He searched Cinderclaw's neck where his claws were supposed to have ripped through, but there was not even a trace of a scratch or even a scent of blood to indicate that it had actually happened. Perhaps it had all just been a dream?

"Pebblescar, you listening?" Cinderclaw looked over his shoulder to where the camp entrance was. "Oh, look! Shallowtail is already leaving. Come on or he'll leave without us."

Finally, Pebblescar brought himself to speak. "A-alright."

Cinderclaw tilted his head. "Are you okay? You're normally so . . . energetic, Pebblescar, so it's unlike you to be so quiet."

"It is?" He didn't remember this.

Cinderclaw gave his paw a quick lick and drew it over his ear before he spoke again. "Did you have a bad dream or something? It happens to me sometimes when I don't have enough sleep. Perhaps you should stay in camp if you feel overworked."

"No, I'm fine, really!" Pebblescar insisted. "Sleep was fine, I was just trying to think. I-it doesn't matter, let's catch up to Shallowtail." He

raced from his spot before Cinderclaw could question him any more. *I shouldn't worry about it,* thought Pebblescar, *it was a dream*!

He continued to follow Cinderclaw, observing the camp around him. Everything was the same, but yet . . . brighter. His nest was in the same place as it had always been, in the center of the warrior's den. Everyone else was the same too, appearance-wise. In his dream, almost nobody interacted with each other as friendly as now.

Pebblescar looked out silently, gazing at the outstretched moorland ahead of him. The forest was just behind him. A quiet breeze drifted towards him, ruffling his misty grey fur. Birds broke the silent and started singing their songs.

The tom sighed and looked at his paws, pondering. *Which is the real world? Why . . . why did I kill him? I'm supposed to be a warrior, going along with the warrior code, but I broke it . . .* He shook his head, clearing his thoughts, Pebblescar realized that there was a quiet crunching of paw steps behind him, stepping quietly over the dried grass. Springing to his paws, hackled raised, he spun around to face the cat who approached him. It was only Cinderclaw.

Cinderclaw blinked and tilted his head. "Great StarClan, I would've thought a horde of badgers were attacking from your reaction." He crept up to Pebblescar with dainty steps. "Can I sit by you?"

Pebblescar muttered something inaudible but nodded reluctantly. "What do you want, Cinderclaw?" he asked warily.

Cinderclaw still had his head tilted, he turned his heads toward Pebblescar and met his eyes.
"To talk to you, Pebblescar, I've noticed that lately you've seemed so . . . distant." He turned away once again and looked at the moorland ahead.

Pebblescar shook his head. "It's nothing really. I just need some time alone." And with that, he padded away from the clearing.

As Pebblescar arrived in camp he looked at each of his clanmates and cringed at the sight. He ran to the warriors' den and padded

over to his nest. Curling up in it, he closed his eyes and found himself to be in the the center of camp.
Pebblescar shook his head.
"No, not again," he whispered.

Pebblescar let out a low growl and looked around wearily as if any cat at any moment would leap at him and shred his pelt in vengeance for killing Cinderclaw. As he watched as his clan mates worked, Pebblescar glanced down at his paws, crusted blood rounded the beginning of his claws, he cringed, remembering the dreadful moment as he sank his claws into Cinderclaw's soft pelt. It was like a thorn scratching the soil of the earth, so delicate.

Pebblescar shook his head, clearing the vivid memory of his thoughts, letting out a deep sigh, he unsheathed his claws to sink in the Earth's surface to hide the blood.

As Pebblescar padded up to a group of his clan mates to separate them and get them in their place to do the patrols he felt a sudden wave of pain as something strong and hardy rammed in to his side. He rolled across the dusty ground and tried getting to his paws while still sliding, making him fall once again. Once Pebblescar caught his breath he quickly got to his paws and glared fiercely at his attacker. It was Glimmerstream, a cat that had liked Cinderclaw.

She snarled at Pebblescar with such force that it made him cringe, although he managed not to flatten his ears in fear.

"What was that for?" Pebblescar spat in rage, "I'm your Deputy!"

Glimmerstream glared at Pebblescar, meeting his eyes, "You killed him.. You killed him!" She hissed through gritted teeth, to where only Pebblescar could hear, thank StarClan.
The group of cats that Pebblescar was approaching had sprang to their paws and let out caterwauls of shock, "He's our Deputy," "How dare you, Glimmerstream?" "What's the matter?" The cats all chorused.

Glimmerstream simply just kept looking at Pebblescar, "To repay the favor, I'll kill you." Loud enough this time for the entire Clan to hear who were still in the Camp. With those single words, she leapt

forward and bowled him over with such force.

Sorry this chapter took so long to get out, but with school starting Aqua and Lightning weren't able to get this chapter out quickly. Sorry!! Please don't throw tomatoes!

Chapter 2

Pebblescar let Glimmerstream batter his body, her razor sharp claws leaving long scratches up and down his flanks. He just laid their under her light body, an object under her power and will. *Why,* he asked himself. *Why let myself be beaten?* But Pebblescar already knew the answer: he couldn't be found guilty so soon. Eventually some cat dragged them apart and he was taken into the medicine den, hardly conscious. The hazy scent of herbs was the last thing he remembered as he drifted off to sleep.

"Pebblescar," a voice whispered. "Pebblescar!"

His head shot up. It was Glimmerstream, her hazel-grey eyes wide and anxious. He was back in the warrior's den, curled in a tight ball with the familiar pains aching his sides.

"Are you alright?" asked the same she-cat who had left him with these scratches.

Pebblescar nodded, holding his breath for a moment before getting up. Hailtail, the medicine cat, must have put some herbs on his wounds, because they only stung a little as he stood. "Just a little sore. I think there was some thorns in my nest." He craned his neck around to peek at his flank; the dark grey fur was matted with blood and a tangy herb concoction. Pebblescar just hoped that the dark concealed it.

Glimmerstream started padding out of the den, her long legs that had just been pinning Pebblescar down swaying gently with each step. "Since you were asleep, I was in charge of assigning patrols. I wanted you on midnight patrol with me and Minnowfrost, plus her apprentice," she explained as the dark grey tom scampered to catch up.

Minnowfrost and Salmonpaw were waiting outside for them. "Okay, thanks Glimmerstream," he meowed back, waving his tail at the

other cats. Minnowfrost's eyes flashed with a smile, and Salmonpaw looked anxious, his dark blue eyes scanning the edge of the camp for intruders.

As a friendly conversation started up and the group of RiverClan cats padded out of camp, Pebblescar's mind was whirring. He had wanted to slit his claws against Glimmerstream's soft belly as she scarred his flanks, but he didn't. He had wanted to pressed his fangs against her exposed throat and watch her blood stain his pelt, but he didn't. And now he was following her numbly, on a moonhigh patrol into the territory of the same Clan where he wanted to kill people.

Nevertheless, Pebblescar was feeling a bit conflicted as Minnowfrost nudged him gently.

"Hello? Earth to Pebblescar," she teased gently, her frosty eyes sparkling with mischief. Salmonpaw made a face, his pinkish ginger fur shifting with shadows.

"Hmm, what?" he meowed a bit absently.

Minnowfrost gestured ahead of them. "Go ahead. Mark the border. That's what we're here for, right Mr. Deputy?" And then she let out a little laugh that made his heart twist a little bit. At least somewhere Cinderclaw couldn't have her.

After a while of patrolling the WindClan border, Pebblescar was found out.

"Hey, are those scratches on your pelt?" asked Salmonpaw as they trudged through a marshy section of RiverClan territory.

Pebblescar glanced up. "Hmm, what?" He suddenly felt Glimmerstream and Minnowfrost's eyes burning into him. "Oh yeah. There was some thorns in my nest."

"Did Hailtail treat you?" observed Minnowfrost as she bent close, sniffing his pelt. His fur was on end down his spine, and Pebblescar knew that Glimmerstream was looking suspiciously at him. "Because there is some herbs on your flanks."

He shrugged nonchalantly. "So what if Hailtail treated me? Its no big deal..."

Salmonpaw piped up, "But I was in the medicine den getting some feverfew 'cause my head hurt and you weren't there."

That comment alone was making *Pebblescar's* head hurt. He sighed. "Can we just drop it? We're getting close to camp anyways."

Glimmerstream nodded, quick to agree to the topic change. "Yep!" she mewed, over-cheerfully. "Let's go." The patrol sped up and in no time, Pebblescar was back in his nest in the center of the den.

The second his eyes closed, Pebblescar opened them in the RiverClan medicine den. His flanks ached just like before, and Hailtail stood off the side, muttering to herself as she stared into the distance. He moved his tail a bit, trying to get in a comfortable position as he assessed the situation, and the medicine cat leaped up.

"Oh, Pebblescar, you're-you're awake! I'm not quite sure what happened, but Glimmerstream is resting in her nest. I gave her a poppy seed to calm her down, and-and a bit of thyme." Hailtail paused her rambling. "Oh, sorry! I'm used to Bumble-Bumblepaw knowing all the herbs. Poppy seeds put cats to sleep and thyme helps with shock," she explained swiftly.

He blinked, staring at her with wide eyes.

"My rambling probably isn't helping! Here, can you get up?" Hailtail asked, light gray pelt shimmering in the few rays of sunlight that drifted into the den as she stepped forward.

Pebblescar stood, giving a few experimental mini steps before nodding silently.

"Let's go see what your leader has to say! I'm sure there lots of explaining to do. I'll go get Glimmerstream. Hold on!" And in a flash, Hailtail was gone.

This chapter was written by Rio :) Sorry le admins took so long to update.

Chapter 3

Pebblescar sat with his tail curled around his paws, eyes anxiously on the ground as he waited for Hailtail. Paw-steps sounded. His head shot up. "Hello?" *I sound guilty.* Pebblescar looked up at Troutstar, a pale gray tom with fiery hazel eyes.

Troutstar dipped his head, and Glimmerstream padded up to sit nearby.

"We have some... discussion," Troutstar began, giving one of his fury-driven glances to Glimmerstream. She seemed to wilt a little, ears drooping and posture slumping. "According to Glimmerstream, she was angry at you."

Pebblescar nodded for confirmation.

"And you said some thing that you shouldn't have," the leader continued, hazel eyes seeming calm before the storm.

He gave Glimmerstream a confused glance, but she just quickly looked down.

"But attacking another cat is no solution, right Glimmerstream?" Troutstar meowed deeply, a growl entering his tone. She rose her head meekly, looking so small and innocent under the leader's towering form. "So I'm going to devise a punishment with my senior warriors." The she-cat flinched at the thought; Pebblescar wondered what the punishment would be. Then a thought occurred to him: Would he be demoted for whatever Glimmerstream claimed he did? He had worked long and hard for his deputy position and having it taken away would hurt more than anything, no matter what... world he was in.

Troutstar turned around, flicking his tail. The pale gray tom padded away toward the warrior's den.

When he came back, the senior warriors were on his tail: Shallowtail, Ripplefoot, Lakestrike, and Reedstorm. They sat a tree-length away from Glimmerstream and Pebblescar. Troutstar cleared his throat, looking to begin a long discussion. Hailtail joined them, giving a look to the dark gray tom before leaving.

"Why?" he meowed softly once Hailtail was out of earshot.

Glimmerstream snorted. "Do you think that I'm going to get you kicked out of RiverClan before making sure I have proof? I'm not stupid, a young warrior accusing the *deputy* of killing another young, lost, warrior doesn't look too solid," the she-cat hissed. "So watch out, Pebblescar, because the second I find you guilty, you're dead."

The second Glimmerstream dropped her snarl, Troutstar padded back over. "We have decided," he meowed, gesturing toward his posse of warriors. "Glimmerstream, what you did was wrong, but considering your mental state after what happened to Cinderclaw, your only punishment will be no going to Gatherings until leafbare. Pebblescar, a cat saying such horrible things to Glimmerstream seems unreasonable, and we have no exact proof. But my warriors are honest, so you will be stepping down from your deputy position for a moon. Reedstorm will stand in your place."

The dark brown tom gave him an apologetic nod as Troutstar dismissed the small meeting. Pebblescar just stared at him, fury building in the pit of his stomach. *I have the sudden craving for revenge.*

After closing his eyes in his nest, Pebblescar opened them to light filtering through the branches of the RiverClan warrior den. He got up, feeling disoriented.

He had been demoted. A sudden rush of concern sparked in his belly, and Pebblescar darted out of the den. He raced toward Troutstar, who was sitting bathed in the morning light.

"Ah, there you are!" the pale gray tom purred, looking rather happy considering that he had just demoted his deputy. *Oh yeah, other world.* Pebblescar swallowed his pride and smiled back.

"I was wondering if I could organize patrols today?" he asked, testing his leader. Hopefully whatever this was hadn't carried over.

Troutstar laughed softly. "Of course! You are my deputy, after all."

Pebblescar padded away, feeling much better now that his position was confirmed. He poked his head back into the warrior's den. "Shallowtail, Minnowfrost- can you go fetch your apprentices and patrol near Sunning Rocks?" he asked the half-asleep cats. Minnowfrost looked up from grooming her pelt and nodded, eyes twinkling. Shallowtail hardly paid him any attention but agreed nonetheless. "Gartooth, Pikenose, Reedstorm. You guys can go fish at the river." After assigning himself to a fishing patrol with Lakestrike and Cinderclaw's sister, Oakfire, he found himself padding down the riverside with the two she-cats.

"So, Pebblescar," Oakfire meowed, speeding up her strides to match his. He gave her a tense glance; practically the entire forest knew of the awkwardness between him and Cinderclaw. "I hear that Minnowfrost and you are hitting off well." Her eyes twinkled.

Pebblescar's eyes widened. He gave a glance toward Lakestrike, who was marching diligently ahead. "Where'd ya hear that?" the dark grey tom frantically whispered.

Oakfire chuckled softly as Lakestrike called for them to stop and fish, turning toward the river. Pebblescar took a few steps away from the white she-cat, listening to the gravel shift under his paws.

"Shallowtail told Greenflower, and you know how she is with gossip."

That... that fox-heart! Now Minnowfrost would probably know that he liked her, and she would go to Cinderclaw, and he would die alone. *Maybe that's a little too melodramatic...* "Great," he groaned. "I hate when those two spread rumors."

Oakfire seemed to brighten up a little. "Yeah, ever since Greenflower became a queen, its gotten even worse! Like, did you hear that rumor about Troutstar? They're saying that he's the father of Echonose's kits!"

"Stop chattering and start fishing," Lakestrike called crossly from downstream. Pebblescar knew her interference was about that rumor; she was Troutstar's mate and the father of his only kit, Bumblepaw.

Pebblescar turned his head to the water. Maybe in two worlds he could have Minnowfrost.

A/N: I'm super sorry! This was supposed to be posted last Sunday, but I forgot! I hope you guys like this chapter :) -Rio

Chapter 4

Talking to Oakfire had proved to help out Pebblescar's dark mood, and he felt great as he padded into the warrior's den to rest.

"Oh, Pebblescar!" A familiar mew stopped his train of thought, and the dark gray tom looked up to see Minnowfrost, her eyes bright and friendly as usual. "Hi!"

"Hello," he replied as he made his way into his nest, which was incidentally close to hers. He had never noticed that before, but the fox-length between them seemed much longer today. "I thought you were going on evening patrol with Salmonpaw—or was that during your training today?" He shook his head, trying to remember all the patrols he had assigned that morning.

Minnowfrost tipped her chin back slightly and laughed, making Pebblescar chuckle along as well. "Yes, the apprentices were all trained in basic fishing methods today; after all, it doesn't hurt to renew the knowledge every once in a while," she meowed. "And yes, I have evening patrol, but Salmonpaw is cleaning out the elder's den after what he did."

"Oh, please do tell!" Pebblescar exclaimed, leaning forward to hear what she had to say.

Minnowfrost glanced outside the warrior's den. "Oh, I better go. Maybe later." Her tone seemed darker, like she had something much better to go do. Pebblescar padded after her, aiming to go get a carp from the freshkill pile. But what he saw was worse. Minnowfrost and Cinderclaw were padding away together, shoulders brushing.

He felt a bitter taste rise through his throat. Why would she do that? Suddenly feeling not very hungry, Pebblescar padded into the warrior's den and laid down in his nest.

Sleep was no comfort, as the dark gray tom awoke in the other world- where he wasn't the deputy, at least for now. The claw-moon was hanging in the sky, bright against a backdrop of star speckled black. He got to his paws, feeling the need for a calming walk.

The air outside was refreshing; a breeze blew across the river and the temperature was just warm enough so that he wasn't shivering.

There was a silhouette against the river-side, a small cat, but definitely a warrior. "Hello?" he called quietly, taking a few steps toward the cat. The cat glanced back, and Pebblescar recognized the bright copper eyes of Oakfire.

She looked unhappy. "Hi Pebblescar," she meowed quietly. "Why are out here so late?"

He shrugged. "Couldn't sleep."

"I just miss Cinderclaw," Oakfire meowed as he sat down at the river's edge. The ground was slightly wet, and Pebblescar felt the cold seep into his bones. "Where do *you* think he is? I mean, Glimmerstream thinks you killed him."

Pebblescar shifted on his paws, listening to the pebbles crunch. "I think he just ran off or something," the dark gray tom lied.

Oakfire's copper eyes were dark as she stared at him. "Really?" the she-cat asked. Her voice was heavy with an unknown burden.

He nodded.

Pebblescar saw doubt in her eyes, and the second she looked away, his eyes darted down to his paws. They were perfectly clean, but his claws were sharpened. His scratches from Glimmerstream had healed. He was innocent looking, but from the day he was born, Pebblescar had never been a decent liar.

"I don't believe you," Oakfire finally meowed. "But I know that you're a good cat. And I know that you would only kill my brother-"

A range like no other blazed in his belly. With a ferocious growl, he leaped up and pinned her down, claws digging against her throat.

Her eyes stretched wide with fear and realization. He was the murderer.

"Don't tell anyone," he whispered before his claws pierced the flesh of her throat. Blood rushed out, pouring down her neck and dripping into the water. Scarlet stained the dark waters of the river. Pebblescar just stood there, feeling satisfaction as he pushed her body into the water and watched her float away.

A/N: This was short, but I wanted to end it there. Thanks for reading, please comment your opinion. -Rio

Chapter 5

Pebblescar opened his eyes, and his chest was heaving as he sat up in his nest. Another nightmare—another visit to the strange reality. He padded out of the warrior's den, needing some fresh air.

Everywhere he looked, he saw Oakfire haunting over him, her copper eyes gleaming with sadness. "Why? Pebblescar, *why*?" Her mew echoed across the camp, only audible to his ears.

Troutstar's light-hearted meow awoke him from his trance.

"Good morning, my deputy," the leader meowed, leaning forward and touching noses with the dark gray tom in a friendly manner. "Are you going to ask to organize patrols again?" His tone was light and humorous as he teased.

Pebblescar shook his head. "I-I was just going to do that, if that was fine with you."

Troutstar tipped his head back and let out a soft laugh. "Yes, it's fine." The hazel-eyed tom padded away smoothly, leaving Pebblescar confused in his wake.

Swallowing his confusion about Oakfire, Pebblescar padded away from his leader to organize patrols. He put himself on patrol with Featherlight, a young warrior, and Pikenose. They were supposed to patrol near the WindClan border.

Featherlight looked a lot like Minnowfrost, with pale gray fur and sparkling copper eyes. In fact she was the sister of Pebblescar's love interest. So, as he padded down the edge of the gorge, he couldn't help but sneak a few glances at her.

"So, Pebblescar," Pikenose rasped. Pebblescar suspected that the tom was due to retire to the elder's den any time soon. "I heard that you and Oakfire are hitting it off well." The tom's eyes sparkled.

He shook his head. "No, we're just friends."

The green-eyed tom seemed surprised. "Really? That's not what Oakfire told me," he muttered, shaking his head.

Featherlight turned to him, her copper eyes bright and wide. "Really?" she meowed to him. "I never thought that you would be after another she-cat."

That statement piqued Pebblescar's interest. Was his liking toward Minnowfrost *that* obvious? "No, no, no," he quickly meowed. "I never have liked Oakfire, and I never will."

Featherlight looked surprised, just as Pikenose had. "Okay," she muttered, turning her eyes to the ground.

They walked further, toward the border, where they marked the edge. The walk back was awkward and silent, with Featherlight and Pikenose glancing strangely at Pebblescar. He didn't know what he did. Not liking Oakfire seemed kind of normal! She was a lot younger than him.

Most of his other patrols and discussions with other cats involved Oakfire, and that same, confused look from all the others. He wondered what was wrong as he settled in his nest.

"Hi Pebblescar," a she-cat purred. The dark gray tom looked up, hoping to see Minnowfrost, but he was greeted by the white face of Oakfire. She settled in a nest next to him. "How's your day been?"

"That's—that's Minnowfrost's nest," he replied carefully.

Oakfire looked a bit confused, but then she shook her head, chuckling. "We traded nests. She's by my brother now." The white warrior pointed her tail where her nest usually was. "I thought you would enjoy sleeping next to me . . ."

He suddenly felt tired. "I'm just confused, okay? Where did all this

gossip come from?"

"What gossip?"

"About you and me!"

Oakfire blinked innocently. "You don't remember?" she asked him, tilting her head to the side. "We had a great talk by the river, and I guess Lakestrike was listening in. Gossip spreads like wildfire in this Clan, and soon I heard the news, thinking you started it. So I kinda told a few friends that we were together."

His eyes almost bulged out of head. "We talked *once*!" cried Pebblescar, keeping his voice low. "How is that any sort of permission to tell cats that we're mates?"

She shrugged. "You've been very forward before. Pebblescar, what's gotten into you?"

It was true. Though he chose to forget it, as an older apprentice he had pined over the young Oakpaw. She was so beautiful, and she knew it. She flaunted it, she manipulated toms, and she even got him mixed up in some messes before. Oakfire was a player, no doubts there. But Pebblescar had begun to think that she wanted power.

Closing his eyes proved to be an escape from the world.

But not from all worlds.

Pebblescar opened them next to the riverside. The sun had barely risen, and he felt exhausted. Dragging himself off the muddy banks of the river, the dark gray tom found that the camp was empty. Every cat was still asleep.

Blinking the sleep out of his eyes, Pebblescar sat down in front of the warrior's den and waited.

"Good morning," Reedstorm meowed, padding out of the den. Though the brown tom didn't deserve it, he harbored a grudge against him. Reedstorm *had* temporarily taken his position as deputy, after all.

Pebblescar nodded. "What patrol should I lead—I mean, be on today?"

Reedstorm gave him a smile. "Oh, there's something we have to do first." The dark brown tom padded into the nursery. Pebblescar settled back into a comfortable position; Reedstorm was probably just visiting the kits.

A steady flow of morning greetings kept Pebblescar from dozing off. After what seemed like forever, something happened.

"Let all cats old enough to swim gather for a Clan meeting," Troutstar called.

A/N: This chapter (as usual) was brought to you by Rio. Sorry for the lame ending; it was getting kinda long. :)

Chapter 6

Troutstar's eyes glimmered with emotion as Pebblescar padded to the center of camp, sitting down in the middle as cats gathered around him. Reedstorm padded toward the front of camp, taking usual position next to Troutstar. Only this time, Pebblescar wasn't in that spot.

The gray tom swallowed, anger building in the pit of his belly. He didn't deserve to be demoted. He didn't deserve to feel the guilt that he felt for the cats that he had killed. *They* deserved to die, feel his pain, and experience loosing the position that he had served for moons.

"I have an important announcement," Troutstar meowed after some waiting. Pebblescar fidgeted from where he sat—maybe the pale gray leader had finally decided that his decision was stupid and that he deserved to be deputy again.

"First of all, Salmonpaw could you please step up here?" The ginger apprentice looked startled, but he stepped up to the rock.

Pebblescar's heart fell. This was a stupid warrior ceremony, a stupid ceremony for Minnowfrost. "I, leader of RiverClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn." Troutstar turned toward Salmonpaw.

"Salmonpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do," the ginger apprentice meowed, voice shaking with surprise.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name.

Salmonpaw, from this moment forward you will be known as Salmonleap. StarClan honors your hunting skills and spirit." Eyes shining, Salmonleap stepped turned toward his Clan as all the cats starting shouting his new name.

"There is also another announcement, but that is not for me to make." Troutstar stepped back, nodding his head toward his deputy.

Reedstorm rose to his paws. "I know that this may be unexpected, but I have a mate. And she is expecting kits."

Pebblescar glanced curiously around the clearing, wondering what stupid she-cat had pledged their life to the cat who had stolen his position as deputy. Minnowfrost rose to her paws from across the clearing, and a wave of shock ran through the dark gray tom.

She was in love with him? *What about Cinderclaw? Or me?* His eyes darkened with anger, and his pads were slick with sweat suddenly.

"Congratulations!" he heard a cat meow, and soon the words were echoing around the clearing of cats.

"Dismissed," he heard Troutstar affirm from the rock. The cats dissipated, but Pebblescar was left—infected with shock—standing in the center of the camp. Minnowfrost padded up to him, her eyes wide with concern.

"Are you okay?" the silver she-cat asked, her voice gentle. "I'm sorry to scare you like that."

Pebblescar shook his head. "No! It's—it's fine. That's your problem—I mean deal, not mine. You can have kits whoever you want."

Minnowfrost's eyes flashed. "That was hostile. . ."

"Sorry," he muttered, staring at his paws. "I never saw it coming! Reedstorm and you never talk."

She shrugged. "We just were meeting in the forest. I like to keep things private, okay?" Her mew gained a defensive tone.

"Whatever," muttered Pebblescar. "You don't even matter to me."

Fury filled the dark gray tom as he turned, padding into the forest to go hunt.

After hunting, the sun was dropping below the horizon and Pebblescar was exhausted. He sank into his nest, ready to sleep the night away.

Pebblescar opened his eyes as a beam of sunlight glowed in his eyelids. Blinking the sleep out of his eyes, the tom padded out of the den, energy filling his body. He then remembered the horrid happenings of the other world: Oakfire and Cinderclaw were dead. He was a warrior, and the cat who took his place had also stolen his she-cat. Bitterness filled his stomach, but it was washed away as Minnowfrost padded toward him.

"Good morning sleepyhead!" she chuckled in a teasing voice. "You missed assigning patrols. I was going to wake you up, but you looked so cute in your nest!" She let out a laugh. "Reedstorm did it for you."

He grew hot under his fur, rage filling his eyes at the mention of the dark brown tom. "Uh—okay. Do you want to hunt?"

She nodded. "Salmonpaw is with the other apprentices, resting. He's going to take his assessment soon." Together they padded out of the camps.

A/N: Rio is back with another [short] chapter, but the next one will be more action-packed! I hope you enjoyed :)

Chapter 7

Blaze is gonna try since she was around when this was first created and she has yet to contribute.

Chapter 7

Pebblescar padded through the forest, eyes scanning the trees with determination. Even just having this beautiful she-cat next to him was enough to make him flustered.

Why does she like Reedstorm? What does he have that I don't? He considered the dark brown tom, thinking foully of his torn ear. He wasn't overly strong or intelligent. In fact, Pebblescar could recall times during their apprenticeship where Reedstorm had broken the Warrior Code and made a fool of himself. So why did she like him over other cats in the Clan?

He kicked a rock angrily with his paw, ignoring the pain that sparked there. It flew away from him, nearly hitting Minnowfrost on the nose.

"What's got you all worked up?" she asked, surprise coloring her tone. He let out a small sigh.

"I'm just. . . I'm a little confused." A thought occurred to him then, and he tilted his head, ears flat against his skull in a show of confusion. "I'm having a little bit of trouble with something. I was wondering if you could help me with it."

"Yeah, sure! What is it?" Minnowfrost responded brightly. He paused to think for a moment, phrasing his questions in his head to make them less. . . personal.

"I have. . . a friend in the Clan, who let me in on a little secret. He told me that he wants to mate with a certain she-cat in our Clan, but he thinks she has a mate already and he doesn't know what to do. I want to give him good advice. You're a she-cat, maybe you

could shed some light on the situation."

She cocked her head in thought. They spent a few moments walking in silence. After a few long moments, Pebblescar's patience began to run thin. Just as his tail began to lash with annoyance, Minnowfrost let out a little sound.

"Did this tom actually ask the she-cat whether she actually had a mate or not? That would solve a lot of his problems," she asked. Pebblescar just blinked. Why did she-cats have to be so perceptive?

"Well yeah, he knows that she really likes that other tom. Do you have any advice that I could tell him?" he meowed impatiently.

"I still think he should talk to her. Maybe he is just misunderstanding things. Maybe they are just really good friends. Perhaps he has a chance." Minnowfrost mused. "Or maybe he should just move on. It really depends." Pebblescar turned his head to glare at the nearest tree, unwilling to form a response.

"I am scenting a mouse by this tree. I'll be back." Minnowfrost whispered suddenly. He watched her stalk towards a nearby tree, disappearing in the bracken. Now with her gone, his tail lashed even more. He breathed in and out, harsh breaths filling the air. The tom closed his eyes and dug his claws into the ground, trying to get a handle on his anger.

A few moments later she came back with a mouse dangling from her jaws. He unstuck his claws from the dirt before she could see.

"Good job!" he told her enthusiastically. She nodded in thanks and went to dig a hole under a tree. As she did a group of cats popped out from the bracken beside them. Pikenose and Featherlight emerged with Salmonpaw, Minnowfrost's apprentice, between them.

"Hey you guys! Troutstar sent us out here with Salmonpaw to find you. It's time for his assessment so we need you, Minnowfrost," Featherlight said. Pebblescar dug his claws into the dirt again. Why did fate never allow him and Minnowfrost more than a moment alone together?

"Oh! Well, alright," Minnowfrost told them. "I'll meet you at the training hollow." Pebblescar watched in disbelief as Minnowfrost remained by his side, watching the warriors escort her apprentice away.

"I'm sorry, Pebblescar. I did want to hunt with you today, but I need to do this for Salmonpaw," Minnowfrost explained the second they were out of earshot.

"Oh, well it's alright. I don't mind," Pebblescar lied through his teeth.

He froze suddenly as she padded up to him and nuzzled his head. "I promise I'll make it up to you!" Her scent filled the air in front of him, and for a moment all he could smell and see was her.

"T-thanks," he stammered. He almost couldn't stop himself from following her as she padded away.

Pebblescar picked up the mouse, which still hadn't been buried, and carried it back to camp. The gray tom walked with his head in the clouds, thinking nothing but her and their interaction. Did she like him? What was that all about?

As Pebblescar deposited the mouse on the fresh kill pile, he felt a heaviness in his limbs. A warm ache of exhaustion weighed down on him, and he felt himself longing for a nap. He went to sleep in his nest with a strange feeling of hope in his heart and a small chill in his mind.

When he woke, he blinked with slight confusion at the empty den. Where was every cat? Then the day's events flooded back to him, and he let out a satisfied purr. Minnowfrost surely had to be back from Salmonpaw's assessment. Maybe they could hunt now!

As the gray tom bounded out from the warriors den, he almost slammed head first into a dark brown tom. It was Reedstorm, the cat who kept replacing him at everything.

"You!" Pebblescar cried out. "Why d—"

"Pebblescar, good! You're here." Reedstorm cut him off. "I need

some cat to do a quick patrol over by Twolegplace. Recently we've been scenting some weird things. We didn't want to rile up the Clan so Troutstar figured you could take a look, seeing as. . .well seeing as you were the deputy so you already know what is happening."

Pebblescar opened his mouth in disbelief. "What do you mean that I *was* the deputy?" But Reedstorm already walked away, ordering other cats around the camp. Pebblescar was left with a sour taste on his tongue. *I thought that was a dream!* He mused.

Any happy feeling that he previously had flew from his mind. The gray tom stalked out of the camp, tail lashing and eyes darkened.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8

Pebblescar's tail lashed back and forth as he stalked out of the camp, his mind racing like a WindClan cat chasing after a rabbit. He opened his jaw to taste the air, wondering if there was any prey nearby to take his anger out on. Normally he would stop to fish, but that would be too time consuming. He had a patrol to complete, a mission to prove his worth.

Sighing, Pebblescar let the pungent smell of RiverClan's scent marks rise into his nose. He crossed the border, enjoying the heavy silence of the marsh. That silence was punctured by the loud roar of a Twoleg monster as it traveled down the Thunderpath. Pebblescar wrinkled his nose at the bitter scent of the monster's exhaust. It was a small path that bordered RiverClan territory, but still monsters traversed the path often.

He looked down the small Twoleg trail, making sure there weren't any beasts in the way before crossing. Every hair on his pelt was raised as he crossed the edge of the Thunderpath, feeling the hardened dirt beneath his paws. Pebblescar bolted toward the other side as if his pelt was on fire and the grass was water to extinguish it.

Lucky for him, water was actually the next thing in his path. The river cut through a small strip of grass ahead, and beyond that was the treecut place, then his destination. "Finally back to my element," Pebblescar muttered, grinning at the swirling waters. He dived in, feeling the cold around him. Shivering slightly, the tom's paws moved steadily as he stroked across the river, fighting the strong current as it threatened to pull him away.

He heaved himself onto dry land, panting with effort. Pebblescar twisted his head around to lick his back and flatten his soaked pelt. Soon he was warm and mostly dry, but most importantly, he was ready to face his next obstacle.

The treecut place was looming ahead. A large wooden fence enclosed the whole clearing, and monsters inside were making loud whirring noises. He had never been there before, nor had any cat in RiverClan. There were only stories about what lurked inside, so Pebblescar's stomach was in turmoil at the thought of entering.

He could go around the entire outside of the treecut place, but that would take much longer, and it was already halfway to sunhigh. Swallowing his growing fears, Pebblescar unsheathed his claws and let his feline instincts take over. He took a few steps backwards, lifting his chin up high.

The RiverClan warrior's legs stretched out in a leap as he catapulted himself upward, reaching his claws forward to sink into the fence. He hit, barely hanging on. Sucking in his stomach, Pebblescar climbed the last few tail-lengths to the top and threw himself over, landing with a crash into the bushes.

There were Twolegs milling around in the clearing, but none of them seemed to notice nor care about him. Pebblescar let confidence guide his motions, darting behind a pine tree and peeking around the side. He was still safe.

One of the Twolegs shouted and pointed at him as he darted toward the next tree. Soon all the fur-less creatures were staring at him with mixed curiosity. Pebblescar forced his fur to lie flat, and he let an unnatural purr escape his muzzle. *They won't hurt you if you act like an innocent,* he told himself, steadying his breathing. A tall male Twoleg walked up to him and stretched his paw out. A scrap of some strange meat was sitting in it.

Wary, Pebblescar stretched his head forward and took a deep whiff of the substance. It smelled like bird with the scent of plants and Twoleg-materials mixed in. Holding his breath, the tom gently bit the meat and chewed it. It had a spongy texture but was surprisingly good. The warrior swallowed, disliking the bitter taste.

The Twoleg laughed and pulled his paw away, tucking it into his pelt. They ignored him as he ran into the bushes, angry at himself for getting caught. "That won't happen again," Pebblescar whispered, starting into a slow jog through the trees. Pine needles

poked at his pads, and the sun's rays created even more discomfort. He ignored his, aiming toward a large opening in the fence that lead to his destination.

The Twolegplace.

Pebblescar quickly ran into the trees on the other side of the fence, his paws already reeking of Thunderpath scent. Luckily there were no Twolegs nearby, so he could walk with the luxury of remaining calm. The RiverClan tom sprinted behind some bushes.

Pebblescar recalled Reedstorm's words; he needed to check for weird scents. The gray tom opened his muzzle and tasted the air, only smelling the strong scent of Twolegs. Then, a sharp aroma made Pebblescar's fur rise along his spine.

Rogues. They were cats, but the smell of desperation and endless hunger clung to their pelts. They didn't enjoy the luxuries of being a kittypet; they didn't lounge in the sun and play with Twoleg toys. But they didn't follow a code or respect any cat that couldn't further their own interests. They were wild, evil, and savage. They had no limits and no boundaries.

Pebblescar hated them. These particular rogues had caused trouble long ago that had killed his own father. Revenge stirring in his blood, the tom considered his options. He could run meekly back to Reedstorm and report his lame findings, or he could discover more. Maybe Pebblescar could even stumble upon something that would amaze Troutstar, and he could get back his position as deputy.

He flexed his claws, sinking them into the soft soil. He would go onward.

Pebblescar lifted his chin and squared his shoulders, ready to face any danger ahead. There was nothing that could stop him. Sure, there were creatures that towered above him without fur or any intelligence. Sure, there were kittypets with their low-hanging bellies and wide, stumbling gaits. Sure, there were dogs with breath that reeked of evil and fangs as sharp as his own claws. But that wouldn't stop Pebblescar. He would avenge his father, and he would be a hero to RiverClan.

This was Rio, back with another chapter :D I hope you enjoyed.

Chapter 9

Pebblescar strode farther, ready to fight. He was sure he still had a fair distance to walk before he encountered the group of rogues, but he pressed on. The revenge-driven tom hauled himself atop a large wall that guarded a Twoleg nest in a similar fashion to a fence, and checked around for any Twolegs, dogs, or other cats before continuing on his journey. He leaped to a much smaller white fence, the scent of the rogues already much stronger. Pebblescar tensed as he realized that the group was much closer than he had expected. If he was correct, they were hiding in an alley only a few dens away.

He peered into the dark, narrow gap, unable to fully make out any shapes, until he saw a blur of white and pale grey run past. There was clearly more than what the eye in the alley.

Wrinkling his nose at the horrid, musky smell of both the alley and the rogues, Pebblescar padded into the waste-filled passage, ready to pounce on any cat who crossed him. He heard voices, low and rushed, before a pair of bright amber eyes appeared out of almost nowhere. The cat who owned them narrowed their eyes, and let out a hiss. More quick conversation happened, and Pebblescar was unsure if he should advance or retreat, but instead chose to stay put.

Before he could even think, he felt a weight land heavily upon him, and he could barely move. There was a dark brown tabby atop him, who was hissing in his face, giving Pebblescar an unwanted view of the the rogue's broken, yellowed teeth. The tom's pelt was matted, and he had a nick in his left ear. His breath reeked as he growled, "Who do you think you are? This is *our* territory." The rogue swiped at Pebblescar's chest, and a small stream of blood ran down his belly.

Pebblescar drew his mouth back into a snarl, scratching at the tom with his hind paws. The rogue barely even flinched, and a small group of aggressive cats emerged from the dark passageway, backs arched and ready to pounce. Regret filled Pebblescar, and he knew

well that he should just give up and let the cats kill him. He winced as the brown tabby who stood on him kicked him and slashed at his ears, leaving blood trickling down his face, blinding him. He felt all his senses quickly fade away, and he was ready to away from this whole situation. The cats he had killed, the love he had lost, the rogues he had foolishly thought he could take on. . . all of that would be behind him when he was dead.

"Pebblescar, would you like to go hunting with me?" purred an oddly familiar voice as he blinked his eyes open. The gray tom quickly scanned around the area he lay in. Something seemed amiss, but it was the white she-cat stood beside him that made him realize he was back in the RiverClan camp, in the warriors den. *Wait*, he though, *was that all a dream of some sort? It couldn't have really happened if I'm back here. Could it have?* Oakfire was gazing at him, waiting for a response. The cat thought that they were mates, to Pebblescar's dismay.

"Er, yes, we can go hunt after I sort out the patrols," was his awkward, rushed response. He really wanted some time alone to figure out what had happened, but the words had already escaped his mouth, and there was no getting them back in.

"Alright then," Oakfire said with a small *mrrow* of happiness.

After his work was finished, the gray tom found himself running towards Oakfire, who had already caught a couple of small fish. Pebblescar's mind was racing with thoughts of what could possibly be happening in the other world he lived in, but he attempted to put all of that aside to hunt with his 'mate'.

They chatted and joked, and it really wasn't a bad experience for Pebblescar, although he wished that the event could have been with Minnowfrost, and he was still thinking about those rogues. Their jaws were filled with prey, though, so he couldn't complain.

Pebblescar did enjoy this little alternate world—or perhaps real world—and he found it a good way to have time alone. He did wish it could be something that happened more frequently than it did, but he knew that there had to be some reason why it was the way it

was.

And then his eyes blinked open, and he felt the struggling body of a rogue beneath his paws. Pebblescar let a caterwaul escaped his mouth as he sunk his claws into the body, curling his claws and letting blood pool around his paws. Yowling, he avoided a blow from behind and hit the tom underneath him again, this time striking soft flesh. A large gash was torn into the rogue's belly, and Pebblescar let out a triumphant yowl as the blood stained the ground around them red.

The battle ceased. The cats who were circled around him froze, eyes dark with anger and burning with a new-found revenge at this strange cat. "You—you killed our leader!" shouted a small tabby, digging his claws into the soil. Heart pounding, Pebblescar leaped into a battle stance, ready to defend himself from the onslaught of attackers.

A weary-looking gray she-cat padded out from the ground. Her yellow eyes were haunted by the shadows of misery as she bent over the rogue's body. "I'm sorry, Samuel," she muttered, every cat hanging onto her words. "You didn't deserve to die the way you did. You didn't deserve to suffer like you did in your final moments. But you're gone, and I can't change that, so goodbye."

Her words echoed through the crowd.

Goodbye.

Goodbye.

Goodbye, Pebblescar.

Suddenly the voice become a cat he knew well—Cinderclaw. The tom's voice sounded loudly as if he was right in front of him, but the rogues paid no attention to the call. Pebblescar could only listen as his dead Clanmate begged for another chance at living, asking for redemption, wishing for revenge.

I just wanted to be your friend. . .

Oakfire's young tone was filled with angst and regret as she spoke

to Pebblescar, pouring out all the emotion that she'd never been given the chance to express as her life was ended seasons short of when she should have died.

I didn't even know your name.

Samuel, the rogue who had died for no reason. The cat who seemed important to the rogues—important enough to stop war against a young murderer, at least.

Why?

The voices cried out in unison, and Pebblescar pushed his way out of the circle, ignored by the grieving rogues as he ran from them, his eyes stretched wide with fear.

A/N: This chapter was written by Frosty, finished by Rio, and edited by Duskie. We hope you enjoyed :3

Chapter 10

The lithe gray she-cat pushed aside the ferns and came to rest inside her den. No cat had followed her in, and for the moment she was free to hide with her own grief.

"Why would they do something like that?" She whispered to herself, head bowed and eyes closed from sorrow. "I thought..."

Before she could finish her thought a few pawsteps scuffled the sand outside her den. She turned, posture straightened, and her eyes immediately hardened to see a few members of her group politely push their way through the vines.

"Scar," One immediately sank into a bow before straightening. "Please, can you verify what happened just now? Many of the witnesses are in shock, and none of their stories seem to be collaborating."

She flicked her tail as an invitation for them to enter the den. They settled a foot away from her, bodies ramrod straight and eyes glistening with mostly hidden emotion.

"We were doing a check-up of that side of the city, you know, the area that borders the forest. While we were patrolling, Samuel told me that he smelled something weird, a foreign scent right on the outskirts of the city." Scar took a moment to gather her thoughts, trapping a sob in her throat.

"He went to see what it was, and he saw a crazed dark gray tom just standing around, talking to himself. Samuel being who he is, immediately jumped up to pin the tom, and they got into a scuffle and the tom killed him! Just like that!"

Scar's packmates let out soft growls of horror. But Scar wasn't finished.

"After he left I took his scent. I think he is one of those Clan cats,

you know, the self righteous ones that live in the forest. They believe that they are better then those not in their Clan. Hhmph."

One of the cats in front of her tilted her head in confusion. "I thought we didn't interact with the Clans." She mused. Scar let out a hollow laugh.

"Well they have always pushed the boundaries a little bit, specifically for the catmint in some Twoleg gardens. I've had some cats picking fights with unruly kittypets, but we excuse that as well because those kittypets were problems that needed to be dealt with anyway."

The first tom that spoke nodded in understanding. "But they aren't supposed to come and attack, right? We had that truce from years and years ago."

Scar flicked her ears in acquiescence. "Yes, we had a deal to avoid each other. It seems that those Clan cats have forgotten their place."

The three cats sat in contemplative silence for a few moments. Scar considered the two of them, a fire burning in her eyes.

"Cotton, Slash." They lifted their heads. Scar turned to the white and pale gray she-cat first. "Cotton, dear, you are young yet. Your father's death was a tragedy that I hope we can avenge. I... I'm sorry for not bringing it up earlier, but I am sorry, very *very* sorry for your loss. If you want, there is ample time to grieve."

Cotton shook her head, ears flattened stubbornly. "There is time enough to grieve later when these *Clans* have been put in their place."

Scar wrapped her tail around her paws, eyes turning instead to Slash.

"It seems I am in need of a second-in-command. Slash, you are a strong, loyal member of our pack. Will you be my Second?"

He inhaled sharply in surprise. "Yes, of course," he responded. "It would be an honor."

Scar reached forward and gave his shoulder a gentle lick. As she sat down again, a cat rudely pushed their way into the den.

"I'm sorry, Scar, but the cats are getting restless and we need to tell them something to keep them under control." The tabby tom nervously ducked his head in deference but still insistently stood inside the den.

Scar stood. "I'll go talk to them right now." She ushered all the cats out of her den, following them right out. The rest of the cats were gathered on the sandy outskirts of the park, just out of sight of the twoleg playthings that littered the area. She didn't even need to call them into a group, they were already waiting with bated breath. She hopped onto a nearby rock that allowed her to be seen by every cat present.

"Pack! Samuel's death was a horrible tragedy that I know we all mourn. I have decided that Slash is to be my Second in Command." She paused to let the pack grieve and cheer at their discretion.

"Needless to say, the cat who killed Samuel will not get away with this. I have determined that he is a cat of the Clans. Now, we have had a truce with them for a long time. But our numbers have grown bigger and we need more prey. Their territory is ideal."

"Are we going to drive them out?" One of the cats sitting close to her asked.

"Maybe we should just kill their leaders unprovoked, how would they like that?" Another suggested.

"I'd like some fat forest mice to fill my belly," Another commented.

"I have decided," Scar interrupted, "To ask the other pack and see what they say. The Clans are big and fat on forest prey, so we need every available cat. Until then, we will lie in wait and keep a close eye on them. I would rather no more blood be shed."

Scar jumped down from the rock without another word, ignoring the chaos that erupted behind her. She flicked her tail for Slash to follow her back into her den.

"Are you sure about this?" Was the first thing Slash got out.

"I think that some cats need to realize that everything is not just about them. That crazy tom is going to learn soon enough why death is a horrible thing," Scar responded, claws digging into the sand beneath her.

Well this happened. Pebblescar is in some deep trouble! I hope things get a bit clearer in chapters to come. I've noticed some readers are very confused about whats happening. Just remember that Pebblescar is a little... crazy.
~Blaze

Chapter 11

The only sound that echoed in Pebblescar's mind was footsteps as he ran from the rogues, his blood-stained paws leaving parks on the soil. He could hear Twolegs shouting loudly and pointing, but the tom only angled his ears forward and ignored them. *Run,* whispered a voice in his ear. *Run until you can't feel your paws. Run until the only thing in your head is me.* Pebblescar obeyed the voice, sprinting harder. The ground in front of him became a blur. With a splash, Pebblescar dived into the river and started paddling across, still keeping the same speed. He could hear his blood pounding in his ears.

"I killed him," Pebblescar spoke to himself, gritting his teeth together. "I killed that rogue, and now they're all mad." He swallowed, remembering the orders of Reedstorm. He was supposed to find out what was happening, not provoke an endless series of battles.

Great. Now I'll never get my rightful position in the Clan back, he thought bitterly, slowing into a jog as the familiar scent of RiverClan enveloped his, wafting into his nose. Pebblescar noticed that the sun was setting, bloody streaks staining the clouds above. Bloody streaks just like the ones that had stained the ground after he murdered.

As much as Pebblescar was disgusted by his own actions, he was also excited. The thrill of sinking his claws into an innocent cat's chest could send him into a reality that outweighed his consequences. But, doubt would always plague the back of his mind, keeping most of his actions sane.

"You've been gone the whole sun!" Reedstorm hissed, padding up to him. Pebblescar noted that not a single hair on the brown tom's pelt was out of place. *Probably sat around the entire time I was gone, just cleaning his pelt and ordering cats around.*

Pebblescar gritted his teeth as he dipped his head, forcing respect into his tone. "I got a little lost on the way back," the dark gray tom lied. "And some Twolegs chased me toward the moor."

Reedstorm muttered something under his breath and padded away, seeming disappointed that he didn't get to yell at the warrior further. With a sigh, Pebblescar padded into the warriors den and settled down in the moss.

The tom opened his eyes to light filtering through the top of the den. Cats around him were awake and chattering. "Hey, sleepyhead!" Minnowfrost purred from her nest. "It's been forever!"

"Yeah, I'm just tired," Pebblescar managed to respond, blinking the sleep out of his eyes. "Sorry."

Minnowfrost chuckled. "Our deputy can't be slacking, can he? You should go organize patrols—we have been enjoying the sun, but there's been scent marks near the border that Reedstorm found." Surprise jolted through Pebblescar—what would happen here if he sent some cat to go check it out. Surely no one would be murdered, and no war would begin.

He gave the she-cat a nod. "Thank you," Pebblescar meowed, licking down the fur on his shoulder. "I'll be outside." The dark gray tom got to his paws and exited the den, tiredness dragging his limbs into the dirt. Still trying to stay awake, Pebblescar padded toward a small group of warriors.

"Gingerfoot, Gartooth, Silvertail," he addressed the group of cats. "Can you lead a patrol near the WindClan border? Gartooth, you can lead today." The light brown tom nodded and beckoned the rest of his patrol. The fourth cat, a tom named Shallowtail, was still standing there. "Can you check out the scent marks on the far border? Minnowfrost reported some strange cats visiting there, I guess."

"Sure thing," Shallowtail meowed cheerfully. "It's probably rogues, though." The rose-cream tom got to his paws and trotted out of camp. *I wonder what he'll discover,* Pebblescar thought as he talked to some other cats who had just entered into the camp.

In the end, Pebblescar decided to visit Hailtail in the medicine den. He wasn't exhausted for no reason—the alternate world that plagued his dreams was leaving him with sore paws and heavy limbs. "Hey, Bumblepaw," he meowed to the apprentice. "Where's your mentor?"

The she-cat blinked from where she had been making a packet of herbs. "Oh, she's gathering some ragwort for Gem—she's been complaining about her pads for suns! I'm just gathering some tansy for Blindeye's cough, so I can help you if you need."

"I've been having trouble sleeping," began Pebblescar. "And I'm never well-rested when I wake back up."

Bumblepaw blinked, turning around from her herbs. "That's strange. I guess I can give you a poppy seed so you can sleep. Do you have any patrols today?" Pebblescar shook his head. "Then why don't you go rest now? I'm sure the light will keep any night terrors away," Bumblepaw comforted.

"I don't think I can fall back asleep." Pebblescar swallowed, thinking of the world where he was a measly warrior and a murderer.

"Okay, how about you come visit the elders with me? I need to check them for ticks anyways," Bumblepaw suggested brightly.

Pebblescar nodded. The apprentice's happiness was quite infectious, so it was hard to keep his ears from perking up.

"Alright! Take this tansy, and I'll get some juniper berries for Gem as well." Bumblepaw pushed the stack of leaves toward Pebblescar, who picked them up in his jaw. He enjoyed having a purpose, even if it was talking to the old grumpy elders.

They padded toward the elder's den. Pebblescar hadn't visited it since he was an apprentice practically, except for once or twice when he wanted a good story. With regret, he remembered all the times that his sharp tongue ended him up in the den, cleaning out fleas and ticks from the elders' pelts. "Haven't seen you in a while," commented Blindeye, raising his head. Blindeye was an ancient-

seeming tom with thin white fur and an eye without a pupil. Even when Pebblescar had been a kit, Blindeye was in the elders' den, telling stories and cracking bad jokes.

"I brought you some tansy for your breathing," Bumblepaw told the tom. "We have so much of it that I thought you could have some of the older leaves." Grumbling, Blindeye took the herbs and chewed them up, wrinkling his nose after swallowing.

Gem stretched out her paws. "Care to hear a story?" she asked, tilting her head. Pebblescar had always chosen Gem as his favorite elder. She had joined the Clans as a warrior when he was an apprentice, and she only served for a few moons before an injury to her spine made her retire to the elders' den. Nowadays, she was perfectly healthy, with limited mobility of course, and numbered seasons left in her old body.

"Sure," Bumblepaw meowed. "But takes these juniper berries—they'll help with the snoring that Blueshimmer keeps complaining about!"

Blueshimmer nodded as Gem swallowed the berries. "Alright. . . so this story is about the time I had to save a young rouge kit from death. He was only a moon old—a tiny scrap of fur named Samuel." The name sent a chill through Pebblescar's body. *Samuel. . . that's who I killed in the other reality!* "Anyways, he had wandered out of his den like any troublesome kit would. I watched him leave, but at first I really didn't care. Back in the town—er, Twolegplace as y'all call it—we all fended for ourselves. But, I was close with Samuel's mother, so I decided that after he had been missing for quite some time, I needed to find him."

"I went out to search, and he had wandered right up the river! Samuel saw me, and he thought he was playing some sort of kit game. He ran straight into the water! I dived in after him, and lucky for both of us, the water was shallow, so I managed to push him onto shore. But before I could save myself, the current swept me away. I was nearly drowning by the time that one of you Clan cats ran over and saved me."

Blueshimmer interrupted. "Wasn't the cat who saved you Ravenfur?"

Gem nodded and rested her head on the edge of her nest.

Pebblescar's mind was spinning. "Thanks for the story," he meowed, backing out of the den.

A/N: This was Rio again! Like Blaze said, I hope this is all starting to make more sense, and if not, I can always provide clarification. <3 Love you all, and see you with the next chapter! -*Rio*

Chapter 12

Scar paced back and forth in front of her den, her eyes stretched wide with anxiety. It had only been a sun since Samuel had been murdered, and now her entire pack was looking to her for answers. But she didn't have any. Biting the inside of her cheek, Scar turned to Cotton, who was mindlessly staring into the sky above. "Do you have any suggestions?" she asked, hoping that her pack-mate would come up with something. "We really need to resolve this. . . Clan issue."

Cotton blinked. "Well, I don't want to counter with bloodshed right away, certainly. That'll just mean more death for us, and I don't want to watch anyone else *die*." Scar noted that her pack-mate's claws were curling into the dirt. She imagined that the pale gray-and-white she-cat was currently picturing the mysterious cat who had killed Samuel. That cat had been haunting Scar's mind, too, but she had to stay strong for her pack-mates, so her grief was much more subtle.

"Right," mused Scar. "No bloodshed. We should figure out who this murderer is before we go any further."

Their conversation was interrupted as pawsteps sounded from around the corner of the alley. Scar tensed, her fur rising along her spine. Her suspicious were dismissed when a familiar ragged black pelt appeared from around the corner. It was Crystal, the self-appointed leader of the other pack that roamed the streets of the Twolegplace. Cats really only listened to Crystal because his mother had been Gem, one of the most powerful fighters in the packs. Gem had disappeared one day, and Crystal stepped up in her place.

"Hello," Crystal greeted coldly, his mew sharp with tones of grief. Even he had known Samuel's power in the pack, and the deceased tom's atmosphere of joy that he had carried with him had managed to penetrate the ice-cold shields that Crystal had built around himself. "What's the conversation?"

"We're discussing our revenge against the Clans," Cotton meowed, anger flashing in her eyes.

Crystal nodded slightly, sitting down and curling his tail around his paws in one swift motion. "I say we find that murderer and kill him."

Scar sighed. She knew of the tom's violent nature, but even that was a little bold for Crystal. "We can't do that. . . right away. I think we should find out *who* this cat is in the first place." She lowered her voice. "Maybe they have ties with Gem's disappearance." Gem's scent trail had lead toward the river, and it ended there after a sudden rainstorm had washed all the smells away.

"Makes sense," Crystal muttered, licking a paw and drawing it over his ear. "But, it's a life for a life. He killed one of us, so he dies."

Scar sighed again. "We'll cross that bridge when we get there, Crystal."

Some time later, Scar had gathered a patrol of the ten or so cats that mattered the most to Samuel. They needed to see this redemption more than any of them. An older rogue named Finch had warned her that these cats wold be the most bloodthirsty, but Scar knew that their concerns were the most vital.

They crossed the river without much difficultly, considering that the current's pull was quite strong. It took them only a few moments inside the Clan territory before they were discovered.

"Hey! Trespassers," shouted a young-looking cat with bright ginger fur. A silver-furred she-cat padded up beside the younger one, an expression of curiosity decorating her face. "Minnowfrost, are those the rouges?"

Minnowfrost laughed slightly. "Yes," she told the younger cat. The silver she-cat turned to the group of cats who were currently frozen with terror. "Would you like to speak to our leader? I'm sure you have a lot to say about the. . . borders we have created." Minnowfrost tilted her head sideways.

Scar shouldered her way to the front of the group, nearly running over a few cats. "Yep," she agreed, her voice echoing through the sparse tree. "We'd like to meet your leader." Scar held Minnowfrost's gaze, searching the she-cat eyes. *What does she know?* An itch of familiarity tingled in the she-cat's pelt as the pair of Clan cats led them in the direction of the camp.

The scent marks grew stronger as they padded away from the river. "Are we there yet?" complained Crystal, but he was quickly shushed. Finally they entered into a small marshy clearing on the banks of a much larger river. Scar avoided letting her eyes wander toward the swirling waters and instead rose her gaze to scan through the bustling cats. The sun was setting, so most of the Clan cats were probably settling in for the night.

"Troutstar!" called Minnowfrost, padding away from the group. Scar tried to ignore the stares of the tiny cats who peeked out from a den. Whispers rung in her ears as a pale gray tom padded out from the den where Minnowfrost had gone to.

"What do we have here?" Troutstar mused, his eyes scanning up and down the pawful of cats. "You must be the rogues who are having trouble understanding our border marks." A hint of hostility entered his tone.

Scar swallowed. "Yes. We want you to move your marks back behind the river." The rogues knew of the border's move, of course, but they hadn't really given much thought to it. "The Twolegs might dislike the disappearance of their catmint, and we aren't taking the blame for your theft!" Scar applauded herself silently for the excuse that she had made up out of nowhere.

Troutstar's whiskers twitched. "Would you rather our innocent kits be killed by disease when you won't let us take a pawful of herbs?" he countered, claws sinking into the dirt. By now, every cat in the clearing was watching. Some were padding out of the dens to catch the drama.

"You complain about killing innocents?" shouted Crystal, but his voice wasn't directed toward the leader. Scar followed his gaze, and she saw the target of his hostility. A dark gray tom had just padded

out of a den, and he was captured in the glares of the rogue cats. *The murderer.*

Before Scar could stop him, Crystal shot forward and toward the murderer with his claws outstretched.

"No!"

A/N: This was brought to you by Rio, again. I find it ironic that Crystal, being typically a girl's name, is a name that I gave to a tomcat xD ~ ~~Edited by Blaze because reasons~~

Chapter 13

We've got an admin who's never written in this before writing a chapter. Can you guess who it is by the time you get to the bottom?

Pebblescar's mind was in turmoil. Gem had personally known the rogue he'd killed? How was that possible? Of all coincidences...

Pebblescar's thoughts took no time to direct his paws, and they took him out of the camp to one of the bigger trees in the forest, a large sycamore. He bumped against the tree, looked up in surprise, and realized where he was. With a sigh, Pebblescar curled his legs under him and settled into a position where he was pressing against the trunk in a place where the roots pushed above the earth and formed a sort of little hollow. He rested his head on his paws, causing the sound of the wind that had been whistling in his ears to suddenly be cut off by the raised roots blocking it. For a moment, just for a moment, Pebblescar let his thoughts go and his mind be free. The worries cleared away, and for that moment, he was in a state of pure bliss, feeling nothing but the soft dirt underneath his paws, the soft grass tickling his sides, and the rough bark pressing against him.

To his tired mind, that moment was enough to send him into sleep. For the first time in a long while, Pebblescar slept without the thought of which world he'd be in haunting him as he tried to rest. His breathing, shallow up till now, evened out until it was barely discernible over the sound of the wind.

Pebblescar awoke with a start. He looked about him, confusion marring his sleep-muddled thoughts until he realized what had happened earlier. He rose to his feet, shaking his head, and started making his way back to camp. Which world was he in now? He

tried to remember the last world he'd been in. Which world had he killed the rogue in? Oddly, he couldn't remember a thing. His mind was unusually, peacefully, blissfully, and utterly blank. All he knew was that he wanted to get back to camp.

Pebblescar realized that he'd only slept for a little while. The sky was tinged with the soft reds and yellows of approaching sundown, so it hadn't even been a sunrise since he'd murdered Samuel. Pebblescar reached the camp entrance and slipped through it, heading towards the elder's den, determined to learn more about whatever had happened with Samuel and Gem.

"Pebblescar." A familiar voice stopped and made him turn. Glimmerstream.

He eyed her warily. "What is it, Glimmerstream?"

Her voice was low and fierce as she stepped closer, her hazel-gray eyes glittering dangerously. "It looked as if you'd thought you were free of suspicion now. But know this, Pebblescar, *I* know that you killed Cinderclaw, and you know what? I think that Oakfire is missing because *you* murdered her. And mark my words, Pebblescar, I'll find the evidence, or I'll wait for you to slip up, and *everybody* will know."

Pebblescar's heart beat faster at her words, but he didn't let his uneasiness show, instead letting out a short laugh to mask it. "You can't find evidence for something that doesn't exist. Go find some other answer to your mystery, Glimmerstream, because it isn't me." With that, he turned his back on her and stalked into the elder's den, feeling the young cat's eyes boring through him.

The cats inside glanced up, but didn't stop their conversations except to acknowledge him with a nod or a word, to which he responded likewise as he made his way towards Gem, who was talking to Fernspots, an ancient tom whose originally russet-brown muzzle was now completely white. He reached her nest and stood there for a moment before Gem noticed him.

"Pebblescar! What brings the deputy to our-" she cut herself off abruptly as she remembered that he had temporarily been relieved

of his duties, and Pebblescar felt rage rise up in him before he fought it down and tried to give off a pleasant demeanor.

"Oh, nothing really, Gem. I was just wondering if-" he was cut off by a yowl from the camp clearing. Pebblescar realized that the odd scent that had showed up a few moments ago was that of new cats. Curiosity won over him, and he said, "Looks like something's up. I'll talk to you later, Gem!" before he turned and padded out of the den.

Pebblescar only had a split second to assess the strange cats in the camp and realize they were the rogues before their hostile gazes had locked onto him and a strange sense of fear rose up in his chest.

They'd found him.

"You complain about killing innocents?" a ragged black tom standing at the head of the group next to another she-cat roared, probably in response to something Troutstar had said, though it was obvious that he was talking to Pebblescar.

And suddenly, before he knew it, a black shape was hurtling towards him and before he could stumble backwards, it barreled into him and he was pushed backwards onto his back. Claws ripped at his belly and Pebblescar let out a guttural yowl before pushing off the rogue and flipping onto his paws.

The other tom landed on his side, but was up in a matter of moments, snarling and snapping at Pebblescar. Pebblescar managed to dodge what would've been a painful nip to his foreleg and clawed at the rogue's muzzle, causing blood to well up in a series of thin lines, but the tom was too rage-frenzied to care and instead just threw himself at Pebblescar even harder, this time managing to score his claws down his left shoulder.

Pebblescar limped backwards, bleeding now from the belly and shoulder. The rogue had only been able to make those wounds because he'd been surprised, and no more was Pebblescar surprised. He shot forward, scratching the tom's flank and opening three deep gashes. He hissed and retaliated by trying to claw Pebblescar's throat, but the experienced warrior was too fast for him and instead

reached above and slammed the rogue's front half into the ground, performing a perfect Upright Lock.

The rogue relaxed under his grip, and Pebblescar reflexively loosened his hold, realizing his mistake a second too late when the tom burst upwards and pushed Pebblescar down, pinning him and clawing at his belly with his hind legs, opening long gashes.

Pebblescar struggled fiercely, but the rogue had him pinned good and strong. He turned his head to the side, almost ready to accept defeat, but then his vision focused on Minnowfrost, pressing herself up against Reedstorm, who had his tail comfortingly wrapped around her. Rage rose in him, giving him strength, and his vision turned red once more and he slammed the rogue tom away with his hind legs.

The tom tried to push himself to his paws once more, but something was wrong with him, and when he tried to speak, bloody bubbles burbled out of his mouth. But still he wheezed, and managed to get out, "You...ca-can't...Sa-muel...murder...get away..." He was cut off by a cough, causing more blood to bubble up and though Pebblescar would have normally grown nauseous at the sight, his anger left no room for any other purpose except for the kill this tom in front of him right now. He stalked forward, and using his front leg, turned over the tom and placed a paw over his chest, causing the tom to yelp in pain and cough out more blood. Pebblescar realized that he'd broken one of the cat's ribs and a sort of grim, sick satisfaction spread through his body as he pressed down more on the cat's chest and saw the only-moments-ago-ferocious cat whimper in pain.

He leaned down until he was muzzle to muzzle with the cat. Even with all the pain, all the torture, the tom's gray-blue eyes still burned with rage and anger and grief. And loudly, enough for all to hear, Pebblescar announced, "Yes. It was *me* who killed him." And with a final, resounding crack, Pebblescar pressed down on the rogue's chest with brutal force and the light snapped out of the tom's eyes and they stared up at him, empty and emotionless.

With a sick smile of triumph spread across his face, Pebblescar looked up to see that the entire camp was completely silent and

Pebblescar's thoughts began to turmoil again as he realized what had happened.

They all knew he was the murderer now.

Written by Duskie.

Chapter 14

Pebblescar's heart was pounding in his chest as his gaze swept across the mix of rogues and Clan cats. *They know. They all know. They know and that rogue is dead and it's my fault and he's* dead. A darkness swept through his mind, making Pebblescar's heart leap into his throat and choke his breaths back. *They know. . .*

"Pebblescar?" came the wispy voice of Troutstar. The leader padded forward slowly, his pawsteps clogged with weariness. Instead of the power-filled, energetic, fun-loving cat that Pebblescar had once served under, the leader had aged a thousand moons in only a few heartbeats. "Did you kill Cinderclaw? Did you kill Oakfire? Did you kill. . . that other rogue?" The gray tom's voice begged for the lies that Pebblescar knew he couldn't deliver.

"Yes I did," he replied, a surge of confidence entering his voice. "I killed all of them, and I'll do it in my dreams too. I killed all of them, and I'll kill you too." Pebblescar's jaw dropped into a wicked grin, eyes narrowing with a cloud of bloodlust.

"N—no!" shouted Troutstar, leaping in front of Pebblescar just as the dark gray tom rose to his paws, claws sinking into the soft ground and jaw gaping, showing his long white fangs. The RiverClan warrior's body hit the leader's with a *clunk,* and Troutstar fell to the ground, his pale gray pelt quickly turning crimson.

A collective gasp of horror thrummed in Pebblescar's ears as the cats watched their bleeding leader, who quickly got to his paws, shaking the blood off his head. Two pairs of eyes glowed: one hazel with a determination lit by the fires of revenge, and the other belonging to the murderer. "You," growled Troutstar, ears flattening against his skull. "You *dare* attack me in the territory I rule, try to kill my cats, and the whole time I thought *you* were the victim." The dark gray tom drew in a breath, meeting the eyes of his elder.

"I was merely attempting to. . . run," replied Pebblescar simply,

flicking the tip of his tail. Troutstar was too shocked by the simple response to continue with his berating. "You jumped in my way because all you can see is a *bloody* murderer. You're the one without sympathy. You're the one who deserves to suffer." Pebblescar pulled his muzzle back, showing his rows of teeth. The leader flinched; the crowd took a step backward, eyes wide. Kits hid behind their mothers, apprentices whimpered in fear of this cat who once was in line to lead them, and warriors narrowed their eyes at their former denmate. *It's my fault.*

Troutstar finally managed to recollect himself. "That's a lie, Pebblescar," the pale tom spoke, a thin line of crimson still trickling down the side of his head. "That's the biggest lie I've heard in a thousand years."

The argument was stopped by the sound of paws crunching against flattened reeds. Glimmerstream, with a few warriors behind her, padded into camp with a smug expression decorating her face. "What's this?" snarled the she-cat, her blue eyes sharp. "Is Pebblescar finally getting what I've been telling you from the beginning? A trial, with Troutstar at the lead, calm as always, and a jury of warriors behind him? Oh, what's this." Her gaze swept toward the rogues. "An impartial group? I can hardly assume that—a greater conflict must be in play." She swiped her tongue around her jaws, taking a suave step toward Pebblescar.

"No!" shouted Troutstar, his mew ringing through the trees. "He—he murdered one of them, Glimmerstream. He murdered one of them, and they came for revenge. They saw him, and he confessed. We're going to drive him out." The tom flexed his claws.

"Not over my dead body," growled Pebblescar.

"That's kind of the point."

Without any more words, the entire Clan launched themselves at Pebblescar, claws extended and maws wide, yowls of anger spilling out of them. Their fellow Clanmates had been killed. The cats that they hunted, shared prey, and gossiped with. The cats that they grew up, fell ill, recovered, and played with. The cats that were each other. Each warrior of RiverClan knew that *they* could've been

the one that Pebblescar chose to kill, or their sister, or their brother, or their kits, or their mate.

He's guilty.

Pebblescar's throat was on fire as he wiggled underneath the pile of cats. Each pelt blended into the next writhing mass of fur, claws, and teeth. The dark gray tom squeezed underneath a wall of apprentices, choking on the guilt.

I'm guilty.

He tore free from the pile, claws unsheathed and spit flying from his mouth, mixed with blood. His entire pelt was drenched in the stuff, most not belonging to his. The pile of RiverClan hardly noticed as Pebblescar sneaked out the back of the camp, the fur along his spine raised. Then his vision went black.

Heart pounding, Pebblescar found himself in a far area of RiverClan. He was on the bank; his pelt was caked with mud and the blood was running off into the water. He could hear angry shouts from the camp only a dozen tree-lengths away. The dark gray tom dragged himself into a shallow pool beside some reeds. The clear water quickly became clogged with crimson, bleeding out in heavy streaks that appeared like a whirlpool around him. His breathing slowed as he dragged himself to the reed bed, scent disguised by mud and plants.

I'm safe for now.

Pebblescar closed his eyes, wishing to appear in the better, *true* reality that he knew was coming. But the dark gray tom only saw an empty matrix of blackness as his eyes stayed shut. The voices of Glimmerstream and the rogue and Troutstar screamed in his ears.

We're going to drive him out.

Is Pebblescar finally getting what he deserved from the beginning?

I thought you were the victim.

A familiar pair of blue eyes, matched with a stunning silver pelt,

glowed in front of him.

"You didn't have to do that, Pebblescar," spoke Minnowfrost, her voice as soft as downy feathers. "You didn't have to do that."

This chapter was brought to you by Rio Incorporated. Sorry about the little delay :)

Chapter 15

Minnowfrost's light blue eyes were wide as she stood beside Troutstar, her legs shaking like a fish stranded on land. Pebblescar's gone, a voice rang inside her head. *He's gone insane. Off the wall. As crazy as a bat.* They told her the truth, but she didn't want to listen.

Finally, the slim gray cat in front of her spoke. "We're sorry for what our warrior did. We do not control him, and we do not represent him. He shows that not every group of cats can produce only perfect warriors. Pebblescar was evil, and he's dead now, wherever he is." Troutstar cast a glance at the splash of blood that the cats were roughly circled around. "He's gone."
The tom dipped his head, but the rogues were going to have none of this.

A slim white warrior lifted her head, anger broiling in her gaze. Her eyes were narrowed with spite. "But, it seems that this cat—Pebblescar—has not only killed our leader. . . he's caused great devastation to your, uh, Clan, am I right?" Troutstar slowly nodded. "And, like that brown she-cat said." She flicked her tail toward Glimmerstream. "You've ignored that blatant truth." The rogue's voice rose into a wail of panic. "You harbored and cared for and fed and protected this murderer!"

"Attack!" shouted one of the rogues, and Minnowfrost could only watch as a horde of mangy-pelted rogues launched themselves toward RiverClan.

Troutstar was challenged by the lithe she-cat who has just been speaking. Her body was small, but the fiery determination in her narrowed eyes made Minnowfrost concerned for her dear leader's life. She swallowed the growing lump in her throat, but before the warrior could leap to save her leader, a ball of black fur barreled into her.

"Help!" the cry rang out of her throat as claws unsheathed, sinking into the soft flesh of her belly. The blood had only began to pour

out as Minnowfrost pulled away, the pain blinded by anger. "You—you," the silver she-cat spat, staring into the eyes of her opponent. It was then that she realized that this was no battle between Clans. This wasn't a battle of surrendering and emotion. This was a battle of true skill, a testament to the cats' training. The winner will be the only one left standing.

It was this that drove Minnowfrost to ignore the kit-fluff that lingered between layers of fur on her opponent's face. It was this that made her avoid the tiny cat's eyes. It was this that tore her claws out of the ground and tossed her forward, her claws sinking into the tom's soft pelt. Flesh tore as she sunk her teeth into the young rogue's shoulder. An overwhelming sense of guilt overcame her as the tom's blood-curling scream echoed through the trees. *I killed him*. The tom's body fell limp.

Minnowfrost pulled away with a heavy weight in her belly. *Is this how Pebblescar feels after he kills? Is this what he felt as his claws tore through Cinderclaw's body? Is this what it feels like to be a. . . a murderer?*

No, this is different. This is battle. This is RiverClan versus the rogues. This isn't just a pointless act of jealously. We're defending our territory. But Minnowfrost could only listen to her feeble attempts at justifying her actions as she leaped over Troutstar, hitting the she-cat's head with a unsheathed paw.

A thump echoed through Minnowfrost's body as Troutstar cast a grateful glance at her, his hazel eyes shadowed with grief. The gray-and-white she-cat was still breathing, thankfully. She blinked swiftly and leaped back into battle.

* * *

Pebblescar hummed to himself as he wandered through the forest, his mind seemingly clear and vastly empty. The towering trees didn't intimate him as his jaw hung open, capturing the wafting scents of the ThunderClan border.

A cat!

His ears perked up, swiveling to collect sound. The young cat was rustling through the bracken, like he was looking for something, and he hadn't appeared to have noticed Pebblescar. The dark gray tom's tail swept across the dirt; his eyes narrowed as he following the tom's movements. *An apprentice, surely.* As the RiverClan cat moved closer into view, Pebblescar recognized him as the recently-appointed medicine cat apprentice. His name was Thrushpaw, and like the bird he was named for, the brown tabby was searching through the bracken for plants to gather.

Finally, Pebblescar let a rough purr escape his jaw, and he stepped forward, the small movement created an echoing sound as claws unsheathed, sinking into the flood-soaked soil. Thrushpaw froze; he tossed a glance over at the dark gray tom.

"You're—you're supposed to be exiled," sputtered the brown tabby, dropping the mouthful of leaves. Pebblescar let a look of skepticism enter his eyes as he took another step.

Clunk.

The dark gray tom kicked a small pebble, watching it hit the root of a tree and roll back down. "Oh, you look so innocent," the RiverClan cat purred, flexing his claws in the dirt. "So innocent. I used to be like that too. Until I discovered the truth—the world is out to get you, and you have to beat it first." Before Thrushpaw could respond, Pebblescar launched himself into the air, paws stretching forward in one fluid motion. His teeth grasped the tiny tom's shoulder.

The RiverClan tom lifted Thrushpaw into the air, giving him a good shake. The tom's eyes rolled into the back of his head; they had been filled with a pure, potent fear that made even Pebblescar shudder under his mask of a cold murderer. Pebblescar dropped him and drew his claw across the apprentice's cheek, purring as a drop of red plopped onto the ground, staining the earth in a spiderweb pattern.

"What's a little apprentice doing so far from camp?" he asked, his voice low.

"I - I - battle - rogues - Clan -"

Pebblescar snarled. "Really, now? Those rogues have caused a battle?" He threw back his head and laughed. "As I told you, apprentice. Everybody's out to get you."

"I - I-" the apprentice tried to respond, but his throat had been seized by fear and there was nothing he could do but stare with wide eyes.

"Everybody in the whole wide world," Pebblescar hissed under his breath, and he sunk his claws into the tom's throat.

Written by the Rio, and edited by de Lightning along with Duskie.

Chapter 16

Blaze here with the newest chapter. I hope you like it!

Pebblescar pulled his claws from the still twitching corpse on the ground, watching as the blood dripped off of his paws and streamed down the fallen body. For a moment, all he could do was watch it pooling on the grass, lapping gently at his feet and staining everything red.

"Thrushpaw? Where are you?" A voice called in the distance. Pebblescar licked his lips, imagining the feeling of his claws sinking into the rival Warriors, feeling the blood run out of their still warm bodies. Then his mind cast towards his own Clan, and what the little apprentice had told him. *They were fighting the rogues*. That meant a lot of bloodshed, and he was curious to see wether his Clan would last.

He looked at the apprentice once more. He realized with a small jolt that his scent littered the area; a thick tang of blood and RiverClan would surely direct ThunderClan towards his old Clan. And with the way he had ravaged this body, there would surely be war. ThunderClan were not known for thinking things through. Now the question was whether he should let that happen.

"Thrushpaw?" The voice sounded again, much closer then Pebblescar could handle. He darted away, running through the forest and from his mild guilt even as his lips curled into a smirk. From behind him the sickly sweet scream of horror sounded, pushing his paws to run even faster to the camp.

He broke through the tree line, instinctively hiding himself from general sight by crouching through the tall reeds that filled the area. Now that he was mere fox-lengths away from the camp, he could hear the yowls of fighting cats and the sounds of blood spraying the ground.

Pebblescar slinked towards his camp, watching as one by one

unfamiliar cats left the camp, bowing under bruised shoulders and bleeding necks. He shoved through the reeds, making a peephole for himself to peer into the center of the camp.

The first thing his eyes fell on was Troutstar, the traitor leader. Pebblescar watched in glee as three rogues tag-teamed him, sending his large body crashing to the ground. One dug his claws into the leader's stomach, another into his neck, and the third wrenched his shoulder until the tom was shrieking for mercy.

I always knew he was weak, Pebblescar thought with a sneer, *Look at him getting pummeled by those rogues- cats that aren't even Warrior-trained. Who chose him to be leader?* Pebblescar failed to notice that the leader was ragged, bleeding already from multiple wounds and exhausted from defeating so many other rogues already. He didn't realize that the tom was pinned by cats who were fresh into the battle, who had yet to lift a claw except for that moment to attack the leader. What the tom did notice was the flash of silver that came to his rescue.

Minnowfrost!

The gray and white she-cat slammed into the first rogue she saw, tearing him from Troutstar's body. The scraggly golden brown tom never even got the chance to defend himself before Minnowfrost tore out his throat with her powerful jaws. Pebblescar's jaw dropped open as she whirled back around, falling upon another tom who was clinging to Troutstar. That new tom was quickly abandoned on the ground, still twitching and writhing even as the life left his eyes. Troutstar quickly took care of the last tom, dropping his body without care on the dirt beside him.

Pebblescar watched with amazement as Minnowfrost dug her paws into the ground, spitting out a glob of blood.

"Are you alright?" Troutstar questioned her. Pebblescar's eyes narrowed as Troutstar limped forward, checking her for any injuries but Minnowfrost jumped away from his touch as if he had burned her.

"I..I'm fine," she gulped in air, panting with harsh breaths that stung

the air. "Was that the last of them?" Pebblescar admired her strength, watched the smooth fur of her pelt shift with her pawsteps as she circled around Troutstar. He loved that she-cat so much.

As she asked her question, more cats from RiverClan appeared from other corners of the camp. They gathered around Troutstar and Minnowfrost, all looking ragged and weak compared to the beautiful Minnowfrost. One tom in particular broke free from the crowd, cuddling up next to her in a way that disgusted Pebblescar. He didn't deserve her. Reedstorm would never be worthy of her; Pebblescar was sure of that.

"They'll be back. For now, let's fix everything up." Troutstar mewed.

"Anyone who is drastically injured, head directly to the medicine cat den," Troutstar instructed, "anyone with some strength left in them, help me remove bodies from the camp. We can..." Pebblescar blocked him out, using his stealthy vantage point to scan the cats in front of him. They were broken. He could see it in their eyes, the lack of idea and thought. They followed a weak leader, and he made them pliable and silly in return.

How can I ruin them? He asked himself, withdrawing into the shadows of the reeds. *What can I do to make them break? Make them suffer for making me suffer.*

As he thought, he realized that he had already left a present for them. It would do as a wonderful start. A war with ThunderClan right in the middle of this conflict with these rogues would leave the cats battered and bruised. The chances of this easily solving itself was low.

"What's that?" A cat appeared, very close to the reeds where Pebblescar was hiding. He withheld a snarl as he backed away, cursing the cat in his head. He darted away once more, heading towards the forest where he knew an old badger set was. He could rest in there, plan and plot RiverClan's demise.

Yet when he curled up in the badger set, he felt a heaviness come over him, and with a sigh Pebblescar fell into a deep sleep.

"..lescar. He was such a wonderful deputy. Where do you think he is? He was fighting like a beast."

Pebblescar shot up, almost hitting his head on the tree roots above him. He peered out in the darkness, ears flicking this way and that in attempt to find where those cats were.

"I don't know. We haven't even found his body. Minnowfrost is absolutely devastated!" A new voice called, even further then before. The RiverClan scent was just soft enough that now he couldn't tell which cat was speaking.

"We think those rogues took him with them. He was still fighting, but they dragged him away from camp and we haven't found him yet. Not even a scent trail! I hope we catch something soon. No blood trails is a good thing, right?" The voices murmured, and Pebblescar listened in disbelief as they wandered off.

What in the world was going on?

Chapter 17

Recap: "We think those rogues took him with them. He was still fighting, but they dragged him away from camp and we haven't found him yet. Not even a scent trail! I hope we catch something soon. No blood trails are a good thing, right?" The voices murmured, and Pebblescar listen listened in disbelief as they wandered off.

What in the world was going on?

Pebblescar's body lie in a bed of shrubberies that had come from ThunderClan's flaking trees. The leaves piled under him as well as over, and surrounding him were tall reeds that most likely veiled his scent. When he tried moving his legs, he realized how badly they ached—after all, his body was covered in wounds and scratches from battle, and on top of that, he had barely gotten any food nor rest. The pile of RiverClan cats had surely dealt many blows to him too, and all these impediments hadn't started bothering him till now. However, as the familiar voice of the RiverClan warrior, Gartooth, came to mind, he thought, *So I'm back to the world in which I'm deputy?*

Don't let this be a trick.

"Pebblescar!" Gartooth called into the air. His voice was past the circle of reeds Pebblescar's body lie. The patrol hadn't scented him.

Pebblescar struggled to his paws, his legs trembling with his weight. "I-I'm here," he tried to call, but his voice was too low since he had just woken. Clearing his throat, he forced himself to yowl louder. "Gartooth, I'm here!"

Don't let this be a trick, thought the gray tom yet again, as Gartooth's ears pricked. Pebblescar forced his legs to rouse and carry his weight, and he clambered away from the leaves and reeds, only to come crashing down in a turmoil of dead bushes. His back arched in pain and he grunted when a thorn pierced through his skin.

"Pebblescar!" gasped a new voice, Featherlight. The she-cat immediately ran toward him, followed by Gartooth and Ripplefoot. "Here, let me help you." There was concern in the she-cat's mew as she leaned down and gently pulled his body upward. *It was not a trick*. "Are you alright?"

Pebblescar gave a weary nod, and sat down before he could trip again. He tried to hold in his breath of relief as he exchanged a glance with all three of his worried Clanmates, remembering in his dream how much hate he harbored for them. "Yeah, for the most part . . ." He gulped down a nervous breath, and looked at all three cats. "Wh-what happened?"

"A fight with those mangy pack rogues," growled Ripplefoot, baring his fangs. "Do you not remember? They greedily wanted us to contract our borders behind the river! You fought bravely, but when they retreated, you went missing too."

"We think they captured you and left you here," Gartooth put in, his green eyes wide. "I'm so glad we have found you. Minnowfrost and Oakfire were worried sick!"

Pebblescar's heart fluttered. "M-Minnowfrost was worried?"

His memories flashed to Reedstorm and Minnowfrost's relationship, and how she was expecting his kits. For a moment, his belly filled with the familiar hot rage of jealousy and bloodlust, but then he remembered: *Reedstorm and Minnowfrost don't have that relationship here*. His gaze traveled down to his paws as his thoughts swirled on. The fact that Reedstorm and Minnowfrost do not have a relationship did not change Pebblescar's detestation for Reedstorm, and he would do whatever it takes to satisfy his own justice.

"Yes, Minnowfrost was worried," Featherlight purred, cutting off Pebblescar from his thoughts. "There's a big thorn stuck on your back. Let me take that out for you, it must hurt." She leaned behind him and pulled it out as Pebblescar continued thinking. The pain of the thorn did not bother him at all. The only thing that bothered him was being with his Clanmates. Even though in this reality he was everything he ever wanted, his feelings never changed.

Gartooth padded in front of Pebblescar, and he flinched at the sudden closeness. "Can you walk? We must return to camp as soon as possible."

"Of course I can walk," mumbled Pebblescar, standing on all four paws. "I was just drowsy earlier, but I feel better now." He walked ahead of them with his head held high, trying to prevent the noticeable limp in his walk. His body was still scratched, sore and injured, but despite being in such a good reality, he felt that he should not show weakness anymore no matter what, especially after what happened in his . . . dream.

Yes, my dream, thought Pebblescar as he followed the patrol back in the direction of camp. *I'm finally back to where things are supposed to be . . . but what if it is a trick? What if the moment I return to camp, Reedstorm is deputy, Minnowfrost is having kits, and Cinderclaw and Oakfire are dead?* Despite his worries, he continued onward to camp, too weak to flee or question the patrol.

Gartooth padded beside Pebblescar, his pelt brushing against his. "If it's hard to walk, you can lean on me." He must have noticed Pebblescar's limping.

Pebblescar slightly allowed his weight to rest upon Gartooth as the river came into view. They were nearly by the camp.

The patrol finally came upon the hill that sloped downward, and passed the wall of reeds as they clambered down by the riverside. The water shimmered brightly under the sun; its light reflected both inside and out of the surface, casting beautiful, clear beams of light. The river seemed calm today, flowing at an unhurried and lethargic pace. Once there, Ripplefoot and Featherlight both turned to Pebblescar, as if expecting him to ask for support to cross the lake.

Pebblescar took his weight off of Gartooth and eased into the water, ready to prove that a bit of an obstacle wouldn't slow him down. The water was cold and refreshing, and Pebblescar's bloody, hot wounds instantly cooled to the touch.

"You—you don't need help?" Gartooth stammered, instantly rushing to Pebblescar's side. "You're still hurt. A cat that can't walk properly

can't swim properly."

Pushing himself forward, Pebblescar murmured over his shoulder, "Swimming is easier than walking. You should know that since you're a RiverClan cat."

Gartooth flinched at Pebblescar's cold answer, and Featherlight paddled to his side as if she was also making sure that he could safely travel to the other side of the lake. Slight annoyance swarmed his mind. *Only moments ago you're the ones who inflicted such wounds to my body!* he wished he could say, but he knew that this was not the other world—the world in which he kills. This was the real world.

Slowly but surely, he paddled to the other side of the lake, making sure not to stretch his wounds. The water around him turned a crystal scarlet, and his gashes began to sting the longer he spent time in the water. His energy seemed to be wasting too . . . until finally, he reached the other side of the lake, hauling himself up onto dry land and collapsing on his side. His fur was soaking wet—seeming almost black, and stuck to his body.

The rest clambered out of the waters as well, crawling to his exhausted side. "You're really strong," Featherlight said, her eyes admiring her deputy's endurance.

Pebblescar lifted his head and met her copper eyes, nodding to her comment. "Th-thanks." He was still breathless to talk, and struggled to get onto his paws.

"A few more steps and we're finally in camp," Gartooth said. "Come on, every cat's worried sick."

Pebblescar nodded and gulped down his breath as he finally managed to stand with the help of Ripplefoot. The four finally made it to the camp's entrance, where Gartooth and Featherlight entered first, followed next by Ripplefoot and an exhausted Pebblescar leaning heavily on his body.

The moment he made it to the center of the camp, cats finally seemed to take notice to the patrol's return. Instantly, Troutstar

padded up to them, his gaze relieved as he saw Pebblescar. "My deputy! I'm so glad you're okay!"

Pebblescar didn't realize that his heart was pounding so heavily to his ribs. A small part of him believed that this was a trick—bringing him back to camp, pretending he was the victim instead of the murderer in the midst of the battle. But the moment he saw Oakfire amongst the crowd of cats, he knew that bringing him back to camp was not a hoax. *I murdered her once,* he thought, *and she's alive!*

Relief seemed to wash over him as he lied on the ground, knowing now that he didn't have to stand his own guard.

"Everyone, give Pebblescar space!" yowled Hailtail as she made her way to the center of the camp. "Make way, I'm trying to get to him!"

The crowd of cats obliged, immediately dispersing into a looser circle around Pebblescar and the patrol of cats.

Hailtail was followed by Minnowfrost, as she was holding the necessary herbs to heal him in her jaws.

"Everyone, *leave*!" Hailtail called even louder.

"You heard her," Oakfire yowled, turning to the group of cats. "Pebblescar needs his space—you can come back when he's *recovered*."

Hailtail stood in front of Oakfire. "You too, you need to give Pebblescar space as well."

"What?" Oakfire hissed, her white pelt bristling. "Why can't I stay with him? He's my—"

"Just go," Minnowfrost said, her eyes stern.

"And *you* get to stay?" jeered the white she-cat warrior, her eyes shining with insubordination.

"I need Minnowfrost helping me. My apprentice is out at the moment . . . If you really care about Pebblescar so much, end this discussion so we can help him! You'll get to see him later!" Hailtail's

nose flared with annoyance.

Finally, Oakfire seemed to give up, and reluctantly stepped away, padding to the back of the camp with her tail drooped. Pebblescar did not even feel the slightest amount of pity within pit of his stomach. After all, he's a murderer in another world and learned never to pity his victims. Besides, he was glad that she was gone, and he'd have some sort of closeness to Minnowfrost.

"Minnowfrost, I'm sorry that you're new to this, but please clean his gashes," Hailtail said, as she began readying her poultice of herbs.

Minnowfrost complied, rasping her tongue over Pebblescar's wet fur. As she did so, Pebblescar couldn't help but let out a purr—*this is a dream!*—and she seemed to notice, purring back.

In the other world, Minnowfrost was never this close to him. In the other world, her heart was set on another cat. But here, he seemed to be closer to her than ever, and his heart fluttered with happiness.

"That's enough, Minnowfrost." The medicine cat shooed the warrior she-cat out of the way, so she could apply her herb mixtures to his scratches.

Minnowfrost padded up to Pebblescar, and touched her nose to his. "I was so scared when you had gone," she whispered, her voice low enough for the two of them to hear. "You—you fought so bravely in the battle—you saved my life!"

I did? thought the dark-furred warrior. This part of the battle was not in his memories, but yet again, he never understood anything anymore. "Of course I'd save you," he went along, speaking as if his memories were clear. "Above my life, yours will always be more important than mine."

Minnowfrost's eyes gleamed with some sort of emotion, and she gave his cheek and affectionate lick.

"Next time you let yourself into battle, I'll stick dangerously close to you," Minnowfrost warned with a purr.

"I wouldn't complain," Pebblescar replied, his purr thickening.

"Alright, you may go now, Minnowfrost. Pebblescar, come to my den," Hailtail said, trying to lift up Pebblescar.

He complied, clambering onto his paws as he limped to the medicine den with the support of the medicine cat. He threw one last glance over his shoulder, and spotted Minnowfrost padding to her sister by the warrior's den after she waved her tail goodbye. Nearby, Oakfire sat with a look of jealousy on her face.

Pebblescar sighed, knowing that he'll have to deal with her soon as he lied down on his makeshift nest.

"You may sleep," Hailtail said gently. "Here, take this poppy seed. It'll soothe the pain and relax you, so you can sleep."

Pebblescar obeyed, lapping it up. "Thank you."

"Sleep," the medicine-cat repeated as he lied his head down.

I'll sleep, he thought, his tail flicking with content, *and when I wake, Minnowfrost will be by my side . . .*

* * *

Pebblescar awoken once more to a blind red-and-gold. His eyes opened in a flash, and he realized something alarming—*I'm outside!* Quickly standing, he observed his surroundings and realized that he was where he had been before, on the day he fled from RiverClan camp and fallen asleep. No longer was he in Hailtail's medicine den. His gray pelt bristled with unease, and his pads ached with distress.

For a moment, just a moment, being with Minnowfrost had him forget about his ever-so changing life. He'd forgotten how every time he'd fall asleep, he'd wake up in one out of two different realities.

And in this reality, he was an outcast that had fled from RiverClan after a battle he caused. In this reality, he sabotaged the Clans by murdering that ThunderClan apprentice and leaving the scent of RiverClan by the corpse. In this reality, Minnowfrost was with Reedstorm, the Clan's new deputy, and was expecting his kits.

This was the nightmare reality, where blood covered his paws, and ferocity laced his muscles and mind alike.

And there's some cat nearby, he thought, crouching down within the tall grass and reeds, catching the scent of RiverClan.

Surprisingly, his wounds did not hurt. They were still somehow bandaged and healed by the medicine cat, and he had enough rest to let him regain his strength. Whoever was coming his way, he was prepared to face if necessary.

Shock strained Pebblescar's very bones as he realized that the patrol was made up of the same three cats who saved him in the other world—Gartooth, Featherlight and Ripplefoot. The three walked along the same path as before, but instead of searching to help Pebblescar, they seemed to be on a hunting patrol, by the way they scented the air.

His ears stressed forward once they were in earshot so he could hear their conversation.

"I can't believe it—Minnowfrost looks like she's going to have Reedstorm's kits any day soon," Featherlight said, her voice sounding rather . . . happy. "I've never seen Minnowfrost looking so plump. Maybe in a sun or two it will happen."

Pebblescar's claws unsheathed and sunk into the ground as he tried with all his might to hold back a vigorous and livid growl.

Gartooth nodded with agreement. "Exciting news indeed, considering our recent events."

Events that should *have happened!* Pebblescar almost muttered under his breath.

Ripplefoot gave a solemn nod as his eyes darkened. "You're right. Who could have known our deputy would turn out to be the murderer Glimmerstream depicted him to be?" As they came closer to Pebblescar, he ducked his head below the undergrowth. "But don't worry, he's dead now. And it's a good thing, too. I never really liked him much anyways."

Disbelief coursed through his blood. Just moments ago, these three were *worried* for Pebblescar, and treated him with respect and brought him back to camp! *It's as if it was all fake!* thought the former RiverClan deputy. Then, he remembered: *But that was then. This is now, in a different world*. Despite wishing to stay where he was before, he was still here, in a world where he murders cats.

And that's just what I shall do!

Gartooth and Featherlight passed Pebblescar's hiding spot, not noticing him one bit. He allowed them to pass. However, once Ripplefoot was close enough to his position, he dashed from the undergrowth and immediately leaped upon his former Clanmate, biting down his throat with all the strength he could muster. Ripplefoot gagged and tried to kick Pebblescar off, but it was no use, for the murderer had already chomped his teeth through the flesh up until the bone. Half of Ripplefoot's neck opened wide, causing his head to fall back. The tom's body went limp the moment Gartooth and Featherlight had noticed.

"You . . . you murderer!" Featherlight growled, grief thick in her meow. "How dare you!"

With a charge, she leaped to Pebblescar, battle-ready unlike Ripplefoot. Gartooth was flanking her side, baring his fangs and unsheathing his claws as well. When the two warriors landed, he instantaneously darted to the side and leaped into the air, landing heavily on Gartooth's back, knocking the wind out of him before propelling himself back into the air by Featherlight's side.

For a moment, the two warriors fought ferociously. Featherlight, being the smaller one, easily dodged Pebblescar's attacks—but Pebblescar was fighting brutally, with the intent to kill. His bloodlust was much stronger than Featherlight, and so was his thirst for revenge.

Raising his paw into the air, he landed a heavy blow to her head with outstretched claws, raking down her left eye pitilessly. She yowled with pain as blood pooled down her fur and nose, blocking half her view. Whizzing to her blind spot, Pebblescar

landed another blow to her left shoulder, causing her to tumble onto the ground with a dramatic roll.

Gartooth, still out of breath, wheezed. "N-no! Pebblescar, please spare her!" He tried struggled to his paws, but couldn't make it as Pebblescar landed the finishing blow on Featherlight's neck, splitting open her flesh with his sharp bloodied claws.

Gartooth choked on his breath, his green eyes wide as Pebblescar slowly made his way to the brown-furred tom.

"P-Pebblescar," rasped the warrior, coughing heavily. "D-don't kill me. We-we were friends, right? We *are* friends!"

For a moment, Pebblescar's eyes flashed. He hesitated—but not out of sympathy. He hesitated out of thought, before looking back down to the defenseless RiverClan warrior.

"Yes, friends. We are friends . . . perhaps in another reality." His tone was deep, tired, but sure.

Gartooth's eyes buzzed with equal fear and confusion as Pebblescar lunged down, killing the warrior easily and swiftly. With a thump, Gartooth landed on the ground, dust and blood rising into the air. The blood of all three of his former Clanmates filled all his senses—it was all he could see, smell, taste, touch . . . and even hear. He heard the blood of his enemies on the ground, crying out from Pebblescar's brutal murder of yet another three innocent cats —cats who did not deserve to die.

The blood cried out to his ears, voices chorusing in his ears of not only the three, but all his victims. *"Pebblescar, Pebblescar, darkness haunts your heart!"*

Pebblescar listened with wide ears as he fled into the trees, his heart beating madly with adrenaline.

"Darkness haunts your heart . . ."

Hey guys, it's been a while since I wrote in this book even though I helped to originally plan it. Well yeah, it was me, *Lightning* . Tell me if you liked it. My chapters are usually long,

so sorry if that was bothersome.

Chapter 18

Pebblescar narrowed his eyes as he slithered underneath a bush, mud slowly seeping into his fur. The wet ground made his excursion all the more uncomfortable, but it also made it more powerful. He was here for a purpose, and not just shoving himself underneath a thorn bush.

"P—Pebblescar?" a voice called from inside the camp. He peered around the leaves to see Reedstorm's glowing green eyes staring him right in the face. *Mouse dung!* Pebblescar backed out of the bush, puffing out his fur and nimbly stepping backwards, practically *taunting* the other tom. Reedstorm took the bait, glancing over his shoulder and stepping out of camp.

"Well look at who the fox dragged in," Pebblescar spat bitterly, images of Minnowfrost hovering in the back of his mind. "It's little baby Reedstorm, who only needed someone else to slip up so he could become the deputy." Smirking, the dark gray tom seated himself, his tail curling around his paws tightly.

Reedstorm flexed his claws into the dirt, breathing steadily through his nostrils. "You know at the bottom of your gut—wait, I forgot you don't have one! Well, you *know* that Troutstar only chose you because of your *mother."* Satisfied with the juvenile comeback, the dark brown tom leaned for apprehensively, as if he was *excited* to loose to Pebblescar. *I can't wait to sink my claws into his heart and tear it out.* He swiped his tongue around his jaw before fully processing the other's toms words.

"We are not going to bring her into this!" Pebblescar yowled, leaping to his paws.

Reedstorm smirked. "Yes we are. You were only made deputy because *she* died in battle protecting Troutstar's little mate. And guess what, she even failed at that! He pitied you, Pebblescar. He pitied your dying father and your already *dead* soul."

"Oh, I never had a soul in the first place," Pebblescar purred, laughter weaving through his mew. At the speed of a WindClan cat, he leaped to his paws and zig-zagged forward, aiming straight for Reedstorm's neck. The attack seemed so futile against such a towering tom, but claws hit bone and the dark brown warrior fell, choking on his own blood.

"Can't even get back up, huh," taunted the dark gray tom. Reedstorm growled, leaping to his paws. The RiverClan cat didn't hesitate; he launched into a complicated move that made Pebblescar dizzy, trying to follow his path as he bolted left and right and up and down and behind him and in front of him. Finally, a paw struck underneath him, sinking into his belly and ripping out a chunk of flesh. Another set of claws raked over his back.

But Pebblescar didn't feel the pain. He was numb to it, just like he was numb to grief and happiness and delight and everything but bloodlust, anger, rage, and hatred.

Those last four emotions were definitely brewing in the pit of his belly as he sprung off the ground. Pebblescar darted in on Reedstorm, jaw opened. He grazed the tom's shoulder with his fangs, and while the RiverClan cat was distracted, Pebblescar leaped up on his back.

An almighty roar of anger escaped Reedstorm's muzzle as he bucked up, trying to rid himself of the murderous tom. Pebblescar was leaning forward, his fangs sinking into Reedstorm's scruff as the tom collapsed on his side. Delighted, the dark gray tom began to climb off, but the other warrior had a different plan in mind.

Reedstorm rolled over, pressing his shoulder blade into Pebblescar's throat.

"Get. . . off. . . me. . ." he managed to spit out, his muzzle touching Reedstorm's ear. "You. . . fatty!"

That was the final straw. With a howl so filled with hatred that it rung back into Pebblescar's ears, Reedstorm flipped off Pebblescar, rotating his body so he landed on his paws. But the dark gray tom wasn't about to give up. He opened his muzzle, letting his fangs

shine in the morning sun.

The RiverClan deputy, at least in this world, charged at Pebblescar. The dark gray tom easily sidestepped the attack and sprung into the air, claws extended. The rogue tom felt every fold of muscles in Reedstorm's body as his claws sliced into his flank. Pebblescar stretched his muzzle, jaw hanging open.

Reedstorm tried to roll over, but the dark gray tom was able to jump off this time. Now, with a new target, Pebblescar leaped upon the cat who stole his position as deputy, his amazing mate, and now Minnowfrost's kits—the ones that were supposed to be *his.* His claws sunk into Reedstorm's belly; blood pooled underneath him as Pebblescar slit his claws across the thief's body one thousand times.

His vision blurred as he made another deep cut, listening to the agonized wail that escaped the other tom's muzzle. *That's not. . . that can't be his. He's dead.* Pebblescar turned around to see Minnowfrost, her belly plump with the unborn kits of the cat who laid, dead, at his paws.

"You killed him!" she shouted, mew filled with disgust and hate. "You killed the *father of my kits."* She flexed her claws. "I will kill you, Pebblescar. I fought to save my leader when I was going to have kits, and I will fight you now."

But that wasn't an option.

She loves me.

Pebblescar turned around, his paws soaked in blood, and stumbled into the forest.

~

Pebblescar opened his eyes to a beam of sunlight nearly blinding him. Surprised, he attempted to move upward, but his progress was halted by a splitting pain that set his pelt on fire.

"StarClan's kits, what's wrong!" he spat, dropping back into the nest. Hailtail stirred in her nest, eyes opening blearily. Pebblescar looked over his shoulder with disgust to see that the wound had ripped

open, dripping red and with the cobwebs stamped into the ground. *It's like my fight with Reedstorm is coming true here. . .*"That couldn't have been an accident or something." He observed his wound again, a bitter taste rising in the back of his throat.

Hailtail stood up, stretching out her legs. "What's wrong?" she asked in a slow voice, padding over. Her eyes widened with shock when she noticed his gaping wound. "Well, that got worse. . . I think someone took off the poultice." She sniffed his back, observing the injury with sleep-infected eyes. "I suppose I should go make a new one. Don't move until I get you cobweb-ed up!" She tried to force cheeriness into her tone.

"I'm fine," dismissed Pebblescar. "Just go back to sleep. . . I can wait in this awkward, uncomfortable position for a few heartbeats while you close your eyes and do whatever it is that you medicine cats do when you sleep."

Hailtail looked skeptical. "You're going to roll over, get dirt in the wound, and infect yourself." She let a small sigh escape her muzzle. "I'm getting the horsetail and the marigold. . . " She trailed off, padding back into the herb stores.

After getting treated and trying to fall asleep, Pebblescar finally hauled himself out of his nest. He limped into the clearing, pain exploding up his leg on every step. He collapsed in a corner of camp, closing his eyes for a second as the hurt faded away from his limbs. The soft chatter of the camp slowly grew from a few cats to a whole crowd of them, clustered around Reedstorm.

"What are they doing?" he spat, anger broiling in his belly. "*I'm* the deputy!"

Troutstar heard the tom's anger and quickly padded over to him. "You are still the deputy of RiverClan," he assured. "I just wanted you to take some time off to rest and heal. You are a very busy cat, you know." He cast a sideways look into the crowd; Pebblescar followed his gaze to see Minnowfrost, her blue eyes wide and tail curled around her paws. "I'll leave you to yourself." Shaking his head slightly, the tom padded into the crowd to help Reedstorm organize everything.

"Hello?" Minnowfrost meowed, jogging over to him. "How are you feeling?" Concern haunted her irises as she leaned forward with apprehension, eager to hear a response.

"I'm—I'm fine," he stuttered back, twisting his head and giving his shoulder a few licks.

Minnowfrost nodded. "I'm glad you're back," she meowed. The she-cat reached forward, the tip of her muzzle brushing against his ear. A purr rumbled in the back of her throat; Pebblescar soon joined her in the relaxing sound.

"So. . ." Pebblescar found his mind blank as he stared into her eyes.

Her entire stature changed after one word escaped his muzzle. "I kind of have something to t—tell you," Minnowfrost meowed quietly, glancing over his shoulder. The dark gray tom nodded, his heart threatening to pound of his chest as his mind started racing.

"You can tell me anything," Pebblescar purred.

"I'm expecting your kits."

~

This one-day-late chapter was brought to you by Rio. Sorry that you guys don't get to have Lightning again; I know you love her ridiculously long chapters! <3

Chapter 19

Pebblescar yawned as he stretched out his paws, staring as particles of dust drifted above his head. As the tom's vision zoomed into view, sleepiness fading from his eyes, he recognized the sharp thorns of his bracken den above his face. The dark gray tom shifted in his nest, his back aching from a long wound that had been cut there.

It wasn't the first time he had woken in peace only to be interrupted by the sharp reality of his world. While the sun rose on one side of his life, Pebblescar was dragging his battle-torn body into his nest and trying not to give up all hope. And as the bleary sun set in one world, he was talking sleepily to Minnowfrost and his soon-to-be born kits. He was living a double life; in reality, everything was handed to him with cheery smiles, in the other he was faced with the grim downsides to his murders.

The sound of pawsteps thumping as cats awoke thrummed in Pebblescar's ears. His sheltered den was only a few fox-lengths from the RiverClan camp entrance. They would never look among their own trees and bushes for the cat who killed their kin.

A sharp mew of pain distracted the tom.

"Bite on this stick," instructed the gentle voice of the recently named full medicine cat, Bumblebuzz. "I see the head of the first one!" Pebblescar gritted his teeth; his mid-morning nap would be punctuated by the pain-ridden screams of a birthing queen. So instead of shoving moss in his ears and rolling over, the tom stealthily slipped out from underneath his bracken den, stomach grumbling as he made his way into a holly bush behind the medicine cat den. "C'mon, push! It's a tom!"

Slowly, the tom nudged some leaves of the bush out of the way so he could see into the den. Bumblebuzz and Hailtail's backs were facing him, but the queen's pelt was visible. Bumblebuzz was licking the tiny dark brown pelt of a kit, and Hailtail was coaxing

the queen. He recognized the beautiful silver fur of Minnowfrost as her back arched and a yowl exploded from her mouth.

"Another one is coming," warned Hailtail as Bumblebuzz continued to lick the little cat. Another ear-splitting shout made Pebblescar winced as a kit slid out onto the moss. This one had a beautiful silver coat that matched her mother's shining pelt. "This one's a she-kit—she looks just like you." Hailtail smiled slightly.One of the medicine cats moved onto licking the she-kit as Hailtail continued to whisper into Minnowfrost's ear. "

"I think this is the last one," Hailtail encouraged. "Push! Give it your all!"

Minnowfrost let out a hiss. "I already am, mousebrain!" growled the queen as the backside of a kit became visible. Hailtail looked skeptical at the insult, but she stayed quiet as the third and final kit slid onto the moss.

The silver queen's head dropped onto the moss with exhaustion as the medicine cats took a step back. "Two toms and a she-kit," Bumblebuzz mewed proudly, eyes shining. "Minnowfrost sure looks tired!"

Hailtail nodded slowly, nudging her. "C'mon, Minnowfrost, you need to name your beautiful kits."

A pair of blue eyes seemed to see through the bush that was shrouding Pebblescar from their view. Minnowfrost lifted her head back up and glanced down at her kits. She pointed her back paw at the third kit, a tiny tom with a silver pelt and green eyes. "This is—is Pebblekit," she mewed, encircling the tomcat with her tail and bringing him to her stomach to suckle. Horror decorated Bumblebuzz's face as she turned to Hailtail. The elder cat just sighed softly.

"And the she-kit?"

"Rainkit," murmured Minnowfrost. "The last one is Reedkit." Exhausted, the queen dropped her head back onto the moss and closed her eyes.

Bumblebuzz took a step back. "Why would she name a kit after the cat who killed her mate?" asked the blue-gray she-cat, tipping her head with curiosity. A bitter taste rose into Pebblescar's mouth as he stared at Pebblekit, who was mewling loudly as his paws blindly flailed around, searching for the origin of the milk-scent that was probably wafting up his tiny pink nose.

"She loved him," Hailtail answered softly, dipping her head down and licking the flank of Rainkit. "Pebblescar, as oblivious as the tom was, was her first love, and she lost him. She lost him the moment he killed Cinderclaw. And Minnowfrost knew before the rest of us, but she never said a word because she thought he could *change.* And he didn't. He killed again and again, and the rest of just sat blindly through Glimmerstream's accusations. We're the dumb ones. Pebblekit will have a fine life as long as no one outcasts him for his namesake. He's just a kit. He hardly looks like Pebblescar, anyways." The medicine cat took a deep breath. "Just. . . just don't repeat what I said."

Bumblebuzz dipped her head. "Of course," she muttered, confusion flashing in her blue eyes. "I understand Reedkit, and I suppose I get the meaning behind Pebblekit's name now, but why Rainkit? It seems quite out of place with the rest of the litter, and she didn't even hesitate whilst naming her."

Hailtail blinked. "Well, Rainshine was the name of Cinderclaw and Oakfire's mother. Minnowfrost loved Cinderclaw, too, and I suppose she would have named the kit Cinderkit instead of Rainkit, if she had been a tom. I don't know why she avoided Oakfire as a namesake, probably because the two were never close, but Rainshine was probably a name floating around in her brain." Hailtail shrugged. "She was a pain-tormented queen. I'm sure there will be regret for her decisions and joy for others, but these kits must live under the names of the cats who came before them."

Before Bumblebuzz could respond, Pebblescar turned and fled, the rustling of bushes piercing the heavy silence. He could hear the shouts of cats as he flew past a patrol, barely giving any attention to the others. He could hear the sound of water rushing as he leaped into the river, paddling quickly across and climbing onto the bank. He could hear the sound of birds tweeting and leaves crinkling

under his paws as he avoided ThunderClan camp, traveling through their territory. He ran and ran until his body collapsed, drained of energy, and he looked at the stars, terrified of his fate. The pain stabbed his heart like a sharp thorn; he closed his eyes, hoping for death to take him away.

This was written by Rio. I hurp you enjoyed. This was shorter than usual, but nonetheless it was a chapter :)

Chapter 20

Pebblescar opened his eyes and blinked at the ceiling of the den. He was inside again, resting in a comfortable, moss-lined den under a protective shelter of reeds and bracken.

The kits were born yesterday. Were they born here, too? What are their names? He wondered to himself as he struggled to his paws. His cuts still burned as if they hadn't been properly treated, yet there were herbs clinging to his pelt and freshly placed cobweb on his injuries. He limped out of the den, peering at the joyful cats in the clearing.

"What's going on?" he questioned cluelessly. Bumblebuzz stuck her head out of the nursery, blue eyes shining with joy.

"Minnowfrost just kitted!" Bumblebuzz explained, "I'm surprised you slept through it, to be honest. She was yowling loud enough for StarClan to hear!"

The large gray tom took a pawstep forward as joy filled his being. They were *his* kits here, not any other tom's. He actually had kits! Now he just had to see them and claim them and Minnowfrost as his.

He pushed his way through the reeds into the nursery. Previously he had observed the kitting from the dense patch of reeds in the corner, and he hadn't been able to clearly make out everything that he wanted to see. But right now he felt as though every dream of his had been answered, with Minnowfrost splayed out before him, her pale gray body curled around three little kits. His perfect mate with their perfect kits.

Pebblescar drank in the sight of them, well aware that simply falling asleep would alienate his family from him. But even though he knew they would hate him every time he saw them, he still couldn't help but watch the rise and fall of the dark brown tom's pelt, the way the she-cat scrunched up her nose in her sleep, how the little gray tom's ears twitched every time Pebblescar looked at

him. They were adorable in the best way.

The gray tom watched with confusion as Hailtail crouched near Minnowfrost's head.

"Well, she's so exhausted that she passed out. Pebblescar, would you like to name the kits instead?" the medicine cat asked. Minnowfrost was stirring, but her eyes were heavy and her breaths long. She wouldn't be awake for long.

"Sure! Uh, they, uh..." Pebblescar was stumped. The only names flashing through his mind were... "Pebblekit, Rainkit, and Reedkit!" he blurted out.

Every cat in the den froze and looked curiously at him.

"Did you just name a kit after yourself?" Bumblebuzz questioned.

"Pebblescar, can you do anything right?" Minnowfrost weakly chuckled. "I like Rainkit, for the she-cat, I assume? I think the little tom can be Grasskit for his beautiful green eyes, and the dark brown tom can be Mudkit for his pelt."

Pebblescar nodded, his body feeling heavy again. He moved forward and nuzzled her, giving each of their beautiful kits a lick on the forehead.

"I love them. I love *you* so much," Pebblescar told her. She looked lovingly at him, eyes drooping once more.

"Alright! You both need rest. Pebblescar, go back to your den to sleep. Your kits will be here tomorrow for you," Hailtail ordered. Bumblebuzz led Pebblescar into his den where he fell into a deep sleep.

~

"Have you had food at all? Anything? Your milk is flowing well, right?" Bumblebuzz questioned Minnowfrost. Pebblescar let out a small groan as a reed poked him in the back. He watched the medicine cat push some borage leaves to Minnowfrost.

"I'm alright, Bumblebuzz. You don't have to worry," Minnowfrost reassured. The gray medicine cat sighed and sat down in front of her.

"We all worry, Minnowfrost. Pebblescar is still on the loose, and your mate is dead. There are so many cats here who want to help you, and we just want you to know that you aren't alone in this. Your beautiful kits will be raised right, no matter what damage Pebblescar might have already caused."

Pebblescar felt a familiar fire shoot through his body. Damage? The only thing he had done was rid the Clans of some dangerous cats! How was that damage? They should be thanking him for all that he had done!

The dark gray tom watched as Minnowfrost shook, nuzzling her kits with an unsettling fervor. He should be with those kits! He was the only person who could protect them, keep them safe from cats like Reedstorm and Cinderclaw.

Those kits were *his*. And he knew exactly how to keep it that way.

~This chapter was written by Blaze.

Chapter 21

"Have you gone to see Minnowfrost's kits yet?"

"It's been a half-moon now. Almost everybody in the Clan has."

Pebblescar watched, his gaze trained intently on the two warriors. They'd come out to hunt together. He'd heard from other patrols, which had gossiped about them proclaiming themselves as mates any time now, but he hadn't cared much about the information except that it meant they'd be alone, compared to normal patrols, which had been increased in size. He let a grin creep onto his face. All because of *him.*

Lakestrike sighed in response to Pikenose's answer. "What with the things those kits had to go through before being born, it's only expectable."

The creamy brown tom nodded as he raised his head and dropped his jaw to taste the air for prey. "It's quite a pity."

The she-cat made as if to reply, but Pikenose's expression morphed and he abruptly cut her off. "Is that scent - Pebblescar?"

Pebblescar held his breath as he watched. He'd rolled in some unknown but especially vile-smelling substance to cover his odor and he only hoped that they were smelling the trail that he'd purposely made and not him.

"I smell it too," Lakestripe said, her tone stripped of its lightness and now filled with seriousness. She shared a glance with Pikenose. "Do we get more cats and follow him, or should we go after him ourselves?"

"I-" Pikenose cut himself off, staring in the direction of the trail. "I want to, but you saw-" His voice trembled and he broke off once again, before finally continuing. "You saw what he did to Gartooth, Featherlight, and Ripplefoot."

"I remember," Lakestripe said, her voice tight. "It's not something that I can ever forget." She turned. "Let's go."

Pikenose followed her, casting one last glance through the gaps in the trees to where the trail led.

Two sundowns later, Pebblescar observed carefully through the reeds as the excitement and playing of Minnowfrost's - no, *his* - kits slowly died down and they eventually fell asleep in a pile of small bodies.

Minnowfrost watched wearily from the side, a small smile that spoke volumes of contentedness and tiredness at the same time covering her face, finally getting and retrieving them once all were silent, taking each one to her nest. Reedkit awoke and began to wail before Minnowfrost shushed him, and he drank her milk for a moment before lapsing back into sleep.

"Minnowfrost," Hailtail's voice came, and she stepped out from the shadows on the other side of the den.

"Yes, Hailtail?" the gray she-cat lifted her head and raised her gaze to Hailtail. Pebblescar's heart gave a pang at the sight of her beautiful, clear blue eyes.

"You should really eat something. Trout, perhaps? Water vole if you're feeling otherwise?" the medicine cat asked, some unidentifiable expression playing over her face. "Come along with me, and we can share something."

"I-" Minnowfrost glanced down at her kits and back again at Hailtail. "Well - I don't think - could you possibly grab something from the pile for me? I'm sorry to trouble you, but-"

"But what, Minnowfrost?" Hailtail took another step forward, a mask of no expression falling over her face barely a moment after Pebblescar was able to make out the concern. "But what? I noticed. I noticed you, muttering in your sleep, the way you flinch when some cat abruptly calls you out, how you bring your kits closer to

you when they stray too near the entrance to the den."

Minnowfrost's expression grew troubled. "Hailtail-"

"No, Minnowfrost. You're wrong."

"What are you-"

Hailtail's tone was ferocious this time as she interrupted. "You know what I'm speaking about!" She leaned close to her face. "Pebblescar - he is *gone*, Minnowfrost. He is gone. He cannot do anything to you from where he is - from the dark place that those with tainted souls, those whom the darkness has taken over, whose minds have been warped by evil, where *they* go." The medicine cat stood, tall, and proud, and for a moment, Pebblescar thought that stars had appeared in her pelt, but they gone were the next time he blinked. "And they cannot touch the life-filled lands of ours, the places where blood still flows inside veins, where the warrior code stands strong."

At that moment, Pebblescar realized, watching Minnowfrost's face, that something had been troubling her, something she'd kept hidden and none but Hailtail had noticed. But as the medicine cat spoke, each word cleared away more and more of her worry.

"You know they found his blood, Minnowfrost. No cat can lose the amount of blood found at the border and survive." Hailtail laid her tail on Minnowfrost's shoulder. "If you don't believe the warriors, believe me, as a practicer of healing."

A dark smile slipped onto Pebblescar's face. He remembered the terrified face of the kittypet, the blood Hailtail spoke off streaming out of the long gashes, the strands of his own fur slipping through it as he rolled in it, leaking his scent onto it.

"Thank you, Hailtail." Minnowfrost's voice brought him back to the present. "I - just - it's so hard for me. To believe that he's gone." The silver she-cat closed her eyes, and Pebblescar realized that she meant the statement both in an apprehensive and wistful way.

"But you must, Minnowfrost. There is nothing else to do but

believe."

Both she-cats were silent for a moment before Hailtail spoke again. "Alright then. Get up."

"What?" Minnowfrost asked, her mind elsewhere.

"Get up. You're still coming with me for that trout."

"But-" Minnowfrost glanced at her kits before accepting with a sigh. "Alright." She carefully disentangled herself from the small forms, making sure to not accidentally wake any of them.

She rose, stretching her body, and Hailtail led the way out of the den.

Triumph rose inside of Pebblescar. Finally. He'd been waiting for an opportunity where Minnowfrost was absent. There may've been something wrong with Pebblescar's conscience, but he'd lost none of the smarts that had eventually made him deputy. He knew that one of the most dangerous fights in the world would be one in between a mother and her young. But Minnowfrost had seemed to somehow know, unlike the guards stationed around the nursery, who had dispersed after the site of his alleged death had been found.

He waited a few heartbeats longer, straining his ears until he could no longer hear the sound of their pawsteps, and then stepped out of the reeds, stealing around the side of the den and casting one last glance about him before slipping inside the yawning, dark hole that was the entrance. He passed right by the kits, looking for another first.

Bumblebuzz lay sleeping, her body rising and falling softly with each breath. Well, Pebblescar thought as he padded to her, it wouldn't be for long. He pushed over the young medicine cat, and her eyes opened, widening almost immediately when she saw him, but her cry was cut off by his jaws closing around her throat and her body flexed under his for a few moments before she laid still.

He removed his teeth from her flesh, running his tongue over his canines before turning to where the kits lay. He made his way to

them, quickening his pace. He had no idea when the other two inhabitants of the den would be back, so he needed to get done as soon as he possibly could.

Pebblescar reached out a paw and softly pushed Reedkit off of the pile, and the movement caused all three kits to awake in a series of mewls. He quickly shushed them.

"Who are-" Pebblekit began, but his namesake cut him off.

"Quick! ThunderClan is attacking! We need to get out of the camp!"

"Oh!" Reedit's eyes lit up.

"But Minnowfrost-" Rainkit started.

"Minnowfrost will come later. We're the best warriors, right? We need to go first," Pebblescar said hastily, glancing towards the entrance to the den.

"Yes!" Pebblekit said, but then his eyes narrowed. "Who're you?"

"I'm Pebblescar," he responded, and suddenly made a split-second decision, looking the kit in the eye. "And I'm your father."

All three of their eyes widened simultaneously. "But Minnowfrost said our father was Reedstorm!" Reedkit exclaimed.

"It's not him. It's me. Minnowfrost was just playing a game with you," Pebblescar said.

"But she looked sad-"

"Never mind that! Don't you want to get out of camp?"

The kits looked towards each other, but the excitement won out. "Yes!"

"Alright then, follow me! And make sure to stay quiet! We don't want the enemy to know we're here, now, do we?"

"No, we don't," Rainkit said, her eyes round as she shook her head.

Pebblescar began to slink by the walls to the entrance, and the kits followed, giggling slightly and tripping over themselves. They made their way outside, the warrior quietly shushing them from time to time, but satisfaction grew inside him more and more as they neared the forest. Finally, they slipped through, and Pebblescar let a smile slip onto his face.

"Pebblescar? Are we there yet?" came Pebblekit's mew.

"Just a little farther," he replied.

But in reality, it was only beginning.

~ Duskie ~

Chapter 22

Pebblescar led the kits farther and farther away from the camp, further and further away from everything they had ever known.

"Are we there yet?" Pebblekit wailed, stumbling over his own paws and grazing his nose on a rock.

"Almost, almost," Pebblescar reassured. "You can ride on my back if you want," he told the young kit, crouching to allow him an easier passage up.

Pebblescar winced as the kit's tiny claws dug into his back, but he stayed silent. When the kit had finished positioning himself, Pebblescar stood and nudged Rainkit, who had been asleep on her paws, into motion.

His destination was the Thunderpath at the edge of RiverClan territory. The kits were too young to travel a safe distance away from patrols, so Pebblescar was relying on the noise and stench of the Thunderpath to hide himself and the kits.

They approached the Thunderpath and Pebblescar led the kits underneath a bush that grew near the edge of it.

"It's stinky here!" Rainkit mewed in protest.

"Exactly," Pebblescar replied. "You don't want ShadowClan to find you and kill you, now do you?"

The she-kit quickly shook her head. Pebblescar crouched down and Pebblekit went sliding off of his back, already asleep.

"Get some rest," Pebblescar ordered the exhausted kits, who quickly flopped into a pile and fell asleep. Pebblescar glanced at the sun, considering. Should he go out and hunt while the sun was still out and risk being seen by a patrol, or should he wait until nightfall, making it harder to see? He made his decision quickly when his

stomach rumbled, leaving the kits in the safety of the bush.

He made it to the river without being spotted by any patrols, and he caught two fish, eating the first one as soon as he had caught it. He grabbed the other one, intent on taking it back to the kits, when he heard distant voices and crouched down, letting the reeds conceal him.

"...Pebblescar?" he heard a voice ask, but he was unable to hear the beginning of the question.

"Pebblescar is dead," another cat said dismissively. "Probably a fox or something."

"You saw the teeth marks on Bumblebuzz! No *fox* did that. And anyways, we would have heard the kits yowling."

"Whatever," the other voice muttered, and their voices faded away as they moved on... towards the Thunderpath!

Pebblescar followed at a safe distance, going from hiding spot to hiding spot. He was fairly confident that the odor of the Thunderpath would mask the kits' scent, but, just to be safe, he plotted what the best way to cause a diversion would be. Could he possibly lure a monster off the Thunderpath?

But, to Pebblescar's relief, no distraction was necessary, as the patrol walked right past the hiding place. Satisfied, Pebblescar went back to the riverbank to retrieve his catch, and the patrol was long gone by the time he returned.

He dropped the fish next to the pile of sleeping kits, none of whom stirred. Pebblescar laid down to sleep, still exhausted from carrying Pebblekit and trekking across the territory.

Before he could fully drift off, a monster roared by, spewing fumes and shining its lights. Pebblescar jerked upright, now wide-awake. He turned towards the kits to make sure they were okay just in time to see Reedkit fall off of Rainkit's back.

Pebblescar smiled and nudged the kit back towards his siblings; he now understood how queens could spend hours simply watching

their kits sleep. Knowing that he wouldn't be able to get any sleep, Pebblescar spent his time chewing up the fish so that the kits, unable to digest solid foods yet, would be able to eat it. As the sun rose, Pebblescar stretched, his joints stiff from sitting all night.

Pebblekit opened his eyes and yawned. "Can we go back to RiverClan now?" he asked curiously.

"You should eat," Pebblescar responded evasively, and the small tom frowned.

"But Minnowfrost isn't-" he began to protest.

"Not milk, *fish!*" Pebblescar interrupted impatiently.

"Fish?" Rainkit's head popped up. "I've always wanted to eat fish! Minnowfrost says it's delicious!"

Pebblescar forced a purr. "Well, come and eat it, then!"

"Yay!" Rainkit bounded towards the fish on unsteady legs, Reedkit quickly following; however, Pebblekit still lingered uncertainly behind his siblings.

"Don't you want to try the fish?" Pebblescar asked.

"Where's Minnowfrost?" the young tom pouted.

"You see," Pebblescar took the young tom aside, unnoticed by the other two kits. "When ShadowClan invaded RiverClan, they took Minnowfrost back to ShadowClan with her," Pebblescar quickly invented.

"We have to rescue her, then!" the tom exclaimed, jumping to his paws.

"We will, but we have to prepare first. You don't want to be taken, too, do you?" The kit shook his head, eyes wide.

"So what we're going to do is go away for a little bit so you can get stronger. Then, we'll attack those mangy fox-hearts!" Pebblescar could see his own urge for revenge brewing in the young kit's eyes.

"Yeah! We'll make them pay!"

After all of the kits had eaten, Pebblescar led them to the edge of the Thunderpath.

"I'm going to take you over one at a time, okay?"

Reedkit's eyes were wide. "Won't the monsters eat us?"

Pebblescar laughed softly. "You'll be safe with me, don't worry."

Pebblescar grasped Pebblekit by his scruff, waiting for a moment when the Thunderpath was clear. *Now!* Pebblescar raced across the Thunderpath, the few brief seconds it took feeling like ages. He set the kit down a safe distance from the edge.

"Wait here, okay? Don't wander off or the long-fanged kit-eaters might get you!" Pebblescar warned, enjoying the kit's fear of his made-up terror.

Pebblescar waited for an opening and raced back across the Thunderpath, doing this twice more to retrieve all three kits.

He led the kits to the edge of the tree-cut place, telling them never to go in or approach the horrible beasts that lived there. He followed the fence line around to the back, deciding to make a den in a hollow provided by the roots of an old tree. They were a scant three tree-lengths from the tree-cut place, but he hoped that would act as a deterrent to any curious visitors.

Over the course of a few days he managed to build them all proper nests, hunt enough to provide for them, and slowly gain the kits' trust while twisting their minds against RiverClan.

At first, they refused to believe what he said, but as time went on and he continually brought them special treats and odd little things to play with, they grew to trust his stories of the brutality of RiverClan and of the nobility of his own actions. True, they still refused to hear a word said against Minnowfrost, but Pebblescar was sure that he would soon be able to sway them in this, as well.

All he needed was time.

Written by le Amazing Annco!

Chapter 23

Troutstar paced back and forth in his den, gritting his teeth together as the sound of steady murmuring echoed in his ears. Outside, all of RiverClan was rushing around the crowded camp, spreading rumors and gossiping. He feared stepping outside his den, for every little thing that the leader said would be scrutinized for evidence.

Finally, after much consideration and thought, the light gray tom padded out of his den, ears flattened against the skull as he cleared his throat, attracting the attention of the Clan. Every pair of eyes were anxiously staring into the leader, waiting for the answers that he didn't have. Hope sparked in their posture; apprehension was thick in the air.

"I—I know that we are all upset in this time of grief," he began, eyes darkening with each word. "I know that we all want to know what happened. But, I will tell you this—Pebblescar is gone. His scent has not been found anywhere in RiverClan territory for suns, so there is no reason to fret. The kits were killed and taken by a fox—a scent was found at the scene of Bumblebuzz's body. She is watching from StarClan, and I'm sure she would tell you the same."

His words sounded like he was trying to convince himself. Troutstar shook off the eerie feeling that was dragging down his paws. Before he could continue, a ragged silver she-cat rose to speak.

"Those were my kits!" Minnowfrost spat, a fiery gleam burning in her eyes. "My beautiful kits were taken, not killed, and those weren't the teeth marks of a fox on Bumblebuzz's body. That was a cat, and the scent of Pebblescar was there! I smelled it before the rain washed it all away." Her head snapped back toward Troutstar. "I don't know what you're planning, but you are a dirty liar. Every cat knows that *he* is the killer, not a fox. Don't try to tell us otherwise just so your perfect little Clan can be in peace." Minnowfrost's muzzle dangled open as if she was going to continue, but instead she dropped into a ragged pile of fur on the peaty ground, a sob echoing loudly from her throat.

Troutstar sighed softly. "She is merely a queen torn with grief," the leader spoke, his voice heavy with weariness. "Ignore her words."

A loud shriek exploded from Minnowfrost's mouth; her protest was feeble and weak, but it was understood.

Troutstar may have had his stance, and Minnowfrost may have been opposing him, but the rest of RiverClan was torn between the two. Who would they trust: The anger-driven queen, or their calm and faithful leader? It seemed like a simple decision, but Minnowfrost had the evidence on her side.

Leaving a large group of confused cats and padding into his den, Troutstar collapsed into his mossy nest. He was an old cat; he had only two lives left, and they were two lives that had to be spent well. He closed his eyes, considering his options.

I could leave RiverClan. . . find my peace without the painful battles and the mind-bending decisions. I could travel until I found safety, and Silvertail could step up as leader. She was a good choice for deputy, despite her youth. I'm sure she could lead well in my absence.

Troutstar dozed in and out of sleep; time was only a blur as he stared at the wall. The decision was weighing down the tom's mind as a ginger she-cat poked her head into the den. "May I come in?" the deputy asked, her gray-colored eyes soft with sympathy.

The leader gave her a weak nod.

"The Clan is in distress. . . ThunderClan has taken Sunning Rocks. Hailtail warned us against disturbing you. Will you please help us?" Silvertail pleaded, her ears folded against her skull.

"I am of no use to RiverClan anymore," Troutstar finally replied, his mew thick with self-pity. "I will only impede our progress. Can you serve as our leader? I need more time to think."

A hint of anger sparked in the deputy's eyes. "Time to think about *what?* Leaving our Clan to fend for itself? You are going to run off and find a barn and live with Twolegs because you are a *weak* cat who can't even stand up. Just a few heartbeats ago I was

sympathizing you. But now—now I understand, You don't want me to serve as leader temporarily; you want me to *be* the leader." Disbelief colored her tone. "Get out. We don't need a dysfunctional leader." Silvertail was standing, her silver eyes ablaze with unforgivable rage.

Troutstar was haunted by her words as he hauled himself to his paws, limping out of his den. He ignored the mews as he exited camp, paws heavy. He ignored the cats that followed him, their whispers only fading into the wind. He ignored the final calls of his warriors as he crossed the border, dejectedly letting his head hang low.

"I have been rejected," he muttered, weakly leaning against a tree. "I have been rejected from the Clan that I used to lead."

Slightly shorter-than-average chapter brought to you by Rio!

Chapter 24

Chapter 24

A callous crackling breached the tainted silence as a swerving breeze swept prominently through the treetops. It carried a piercing whistle sharply defined by a chilling tone to its spiky song, jagged notes and an uneasy tempo conducted by a wayward cloud. Sorrowful leaves fell hopelessly to the ground, twirling in shattered hope and dying as they hit the ground silently. Misery hung in the atmosphere, and it couldn't be shook; it rattled bones of trespassers in a sadistic manner, no mercy shown in the wind.

Pitiful mewls echoed hopelessly through the air as they pulsed from a broken home. Terror twined in the ruckus and sparked the noise with youth, grief and loneliness prominent in such a wail. Secrecy lied with them as a presence hushed them sharply, but no form of discipline could silence such a call. Pebblescar couldn't suffice to his own wishes, however drastic they were.

Pattering forced him into a cold shiver, a light amount of rain crashing inside his lair against his pelt. He ushered the kits back to keep them away, but his thoughts seemed glued elsewhere. Reedkit whimpered softly, quietening himself as he was met with the ominous scowl he learned to fear. Pebblescar's promises never followed through; Reedkit missed the sanctuary of his Mother, longed for her reassurance in his perky little ear.

"I want Minnowfrost!" Rainkit squeaked defiantly, her confidence far greater than her brothers'.

Pebblescar grunted. "We have to go and save her, remember? From the ShadowClan warriors!"

He felt his eyes haze over as the scene he longed to make a reality washed over his senses. The blood of a treacherous foe dripping from his claws, the rush of triumph through his veins, and the loving gaze of Minnowfrost meeting his as she succumbed to him

finally. He could almost feel her fur twining with his, smell her scent stronger than ever. He'd made such a perfect existence elsewhere, why was the correct one such a disappointment?

"Pebblescar, I'm hungry!"

Pebblescar snapped his head around and laid eyes on Pebblekit, his stare filled with need. He gulped in slight guilt as he admired the kits stature; his small paws shook violently, and the gentle sound of his belly rumbling caught his attention. He sighed quietly, pondering a solution.

"Why don't I go and find us some fish? You like fish, right?" he suggested uncertainly.

Pebblekit frowned. "It sounds yucky."

Rainkit nudged her brother gently, her intentions positive. "But RiverClan warriors always tell their apprentices that fish will make them strong!"

Reedkit lit up, his claws unsheathed ready to pounce. Pebblescar chuckled at the mere size of them; they resembled a shredded thorn. "We have to be strong to save Minnowfrost! Can we have fish, Pebblescar?"

He nosed the kit playfully, toying at his flyaway fur. "Of course, but you must promise to stay here while I'm gone."

Rainkit shuddered. "But what if the kit-eaters come?"

"They won't, I made sure of it," Pebblescar assured her patronisingly.

Reedkit rested his tail on his sister's back. "Besides, you have your big, strong brothers to take care of you!"

Pebblekit mumbled in agreement, gazing longingly out at the scene outside. Pebblescar frowned at the kits worrying curiosity, but he kept his frets to himself.

"Alright, I'll be back soon. And remember, stay here," he reminded

them, bidding the kits goodbye.

He hauled himself out of the partially raised den he resided in, gazing back momentarily at the kits he left behind. Rainkit and Reedkit smiled broadly, but Pebblekit stared mournfully at him. *What's the matter with that kit?*

Pebblescar began towards the Thunderpath, its foul stench pulsing violently from its black soils. A monster gained on him, the blare of crashing pollution causing his ears to ring the closer he got. His fur flew sideways as it stormed past, making him yip in surprise. His paws felt warm as he pressed up on the path, darting his head from right to left to assure his safety. When a vacancy appeared, he thundered across and darted into RiverClan territory, pleased to be free of exposure.

Pebblescar panted and shook away the experience, searching for a river to fish from. He knew one trickled close to RiverClan camp, but the risk was one he wasn't willing to take. He pushed past several trees, feeling the occasional burr cling to his fur and push off again as he brushed against a remover. The bark felt sharper than usual, as though it were warding him away. Pebblescar eyed the tree intimidatingly, confronting his delusions. He was powerful, he was a threat; he wanted everyone and everything to know, anything that got in his way.

Minnowfrost... Minnowfrost... Rainkit... Reedkit... Pebblekit...

"What am I doing?"

Pebblescar halted with an unprovoked jolt and stared vacantly towards the ground. His eyes were widening slowly, though he kept his brow furrowed to form a frown. His fur bristled as his thoughts surged through his body, riddled with doubt and regret. He'd stolen kits, for what? He'd almost forgotten his reasoning, and whatever excuse he'd conjured up and forced himself to believe seemed worthless and meaningless. Their youth masked all accusation and sparks of realisation which meant his ideology faded into non-existence. He needed some cat to challenge him, to give him a purpose. Otherwise, the deaths, the kidnapping, the blood... It all meant nothing.

"Minnowfrost... She's making you weak."

Pebblescar gazed back at the same tree that'd challenged him, saw the wilting bark and weakness in its core. There he found his purpose; power and strength, that was what kept his heart pounding. He continued further, his head held high with such a reason keeping his paws moving. Every crusted leaf he trampled on, every flower that cowered and snapped at the stem as he strolled, it made him dominant. As long as he kept the weakness he knew lied inside him, his lust, repressed and buried, he could continue. He could kill again if given half a chance.

He pressed forward at a leisurely stroll, before the scent of fish filled his nose. He hadn't realised he'd walked far enough to gain such a sweet smell, but sure enough the harsh rushing of the stream caught his attention and pushed his ears forward. He felt the dirt beneath his feet begin to thin into a smoother stone, the colour similar to his pelt; he was camouflaged by pebbles, the irony struck him and forced a smile from him. He saw a small fish surge through the water and he licked his teeth hungrily. *Can I catch that without trouble?*

He dropped to a crouch and darted his head around, and just as he deemed the area vacant, a figure arose from the shadows. Surprised and worried, Pebblescar darted back into the trees, light dappling against his fur. A pale grey figure moved slowly and begrudgingly forward, their fur shaggy and old. He squinted to scan the cat closer, trying to define their features, and to his amazement, the hazel eyes of Troutstar met him. *What's an old fool like him doing out here?*

Troutstar lifted himself up with unease to the other side of the river, stretching his back out. He gazed dejectedly into the river and caught his rippled reflection. He sighed in a defeatist manner, dropping his haunches.

"I'm useless. I can't lead a Clan, Silvertail was right," he muttered.

Pebblescar tilted his head. *What's wrong with him?*

"Troutstar, I suppose I don't deserve that name anymore. I have no

faith, and I'm not a leader. Not anymore," he grumbled to himself, his voice cracking at the mention of his demotion.

Pebblescar gasped sharply, his ears perked upright immediately. *They kicked him out?! Good riddance, I guess.*

Troutstar stomped with his right paw, hissing. "This is all Pebblescar's doing."

He paced around in a circle while Pebblescar waited for his expansion, unamused. The leader peered up at the skies to be met with a dismal drizzle, the clouds greyer than his mood.

"He was such a good cat, I would've been happy to leave him as Pebblestar. But the traitor had to do what he did, had to ruin the lives of every RiverClan cat in sight," he snarled, smacking the water.

Pebblescar chuckled to himself, but he realised there was no cat to mock the leader beside him. He winced, frowning and shuffling his paws sadly. *Oakfire... Cinderclaw... I killed them first, I took away their lives.*

"Those poor cats, whatever are their families to do? He left Minnowfrost's kits with no Father, RiverClan with no real deputy and a ton of grief. I can't begin to count the others... Bumblebuzz... Hailtail, and poor, poor Oakfire."

Pebblescar pressed his nose into his paws, the stench of blood filling his senses. No amount of grooming could shake that smell, it was engraved in his claws. He squeezed his eyes tightly shut and pursed his mouth firmly in case he wailed. *I want that other reality to come back! I want to go back...*

Troutstar huffed, staring into the water. "But you know who I feel most sorry for? Do you Pebblescar? You're up there, burning in the flames of the Dark Forest where you rightfully belong!"

Pebblescar whimpered, his eyes glistening. Troutstar wailed. "I feel sorry for Minnowfrost, and those poor kits I know you stole! If you were still here, I'd fight you until my last breath to avenge those

little ones."

Pebblescar lifted his head up abruptly, inhaling sharply. A request he could finally suffice, at what cost? He could think of none, but his thoughts were not in line. He rose to his paws and crept out from the thicket he hid behind, his hackles raised. He snapped a twig and caught Troutstar's attention, and the leader went pale.

"Is that a proposal, Troutstar?" he asked with a snarl, leaping atop the opposite river bank.

Troutstar stepped back, breathing quickly. "You... How have you still survived with such a filthy conscience?! You should've ended yourself long ago."

Pebblescar smirked, grooming his paw. "RiverClan should've kicked you out long ago, it's only now they've realised how inferior you really are."

Troutstar hissed, lashing his tail. "You've been listening this entire time?! You waste of air, get out of here!"

Pebblescar stepped into the river, feeling the coolness of the water soothe his skin. He waded to the middle of the gushing stream and paused, staring the leader down.

"But the thing is, you said you'd fight me until your last breath if I still lived, and here I am. You're no liar, right Troutstar?"

The leader growled, stepping into the water in front of him. He kept a cautious stance as he slipped into the river, his hackles raised. Troutstar took a stride forward, standing whisker lengths from Pebblescar's grasp. But, neither struck. They simple stood in uncomfortable silence, anxiety riddling the leaders core. He scanned Pebblescar up and down, before unsheathing his claws.

"You're not the same cat anymore, and I'll gladly give my life to put an end to you."

Pebblescar yowled and lunged forward, scrabbling at Troutstar. The leader yipped and bounced back, his head slashed away. He hissed, launching himself as Pebblescar's shoulder and sinking his teeth

into his flesh. He felt the grey tom rip at his leg, but Troutstar shredded his neck and he ripped a chunk of his shoulder away. Pebblescar wailed in agony, a flood of blood pouring from his wound. Troutstar licked his teeth as his opponent stood in shock; though he was old, he still had some fight left in him.

Pebblescar dived forward and ducked under the water, scratching at Troutstar's legs. The leader lifted one up to strike him, but he surged forward and pushed the leader up from his belly, sinking his claws into his tender flesh. Troutstar toppled into the water as Pebblescar swiftly bounded towards him, ripping at his belly as soon as he met with him. He screeched, muffled by the water, and hauled himself up. He gasped for breath, but before he could retain a fighting stance Pebblescar struck again, striking his neck with difficulty. He placed his paw on the back of his head and pushed it downwards in an attempt to drown him, but Troutstar twisted around and bit Pebblescar's neck. He drew back and the elder flailed in the water, scrabbling desperately back to his paws. Pebblescar saw he was tiring and smirked; it wouldn't be long until he met his end.

He yowled a curse to the sky and leaped atop Troutstar, his old back giving way under Pebblescar's weight. He pushed his front paw on his head and kept most of his balance on his back to hold him down. He panted as Troutstar tried to thrash at his hold, fighting for the chance to breathe. Bubbles pulsed from his mouth as he lost air and Pebblescar chuckled villainously; a death quick enough to cause no uproar, but slow enough to hurt.

"This is it Troutstar, StarClan's waiting for you," Pebblescar teased him as he screamed.

He spat. "Until your last breath, you said, but you took that a while before such an end, didn't you? Did you really think you could challenge me?"

Troutstar began to choke, his mouth and nose filling rapidly with fluid. Pebblescar pushed him down further, but the movement was for his own pleasure. The leader was growing weaker by the moment, his life seeping away.

"I can add your name to the cats I've slaughtered. Who is there now? Oakfire, Cinderclaw, Reedstorm, Hailtail, Bumblebuzz, Gartooth, there's probably more, and now Troutstar."

Troutstar began to cease struggling, his figure stiffening. Pebblescar lowered his head just above the surface and murmured into his ear. "Rot, Troutstar, rot."

The leader stopped fighting. The small bubbles that pushed up from his mouth stopped instantly, one lone, elder ball popping silently. Pebblescar felt his head lift, but not in a stance of battle. As he cautiously stepped off of Troutstar, his body lifted to the surface, but no life came from it. His hazel eyes dulled, his paws fell stiff. Troutstar was dead.

Pebblescar backed away from the body, staring straight at him in sickening victory. His blood wafted beneath the surface, his fur torn and floating aimlessly along the river, soon to be washed away. He shuddered, scrabbling at the river bank. He hauled himself out, his pelt dripping with a diluted red substance, and a pang of guilt struck his heart. He'd murdered the leader he'd served for so long, and he hadn't thought twice about it.

He whimpered sorrowfully. "I... I'm sorry Troutstar... I'm so sorry..."

Pebblescar fled the scene, gulping back wails and screams as he realised his sins. He bounded swiftly back to where he came, a plan pulsing through the thick wall of remorse blocking realism from view. He'd go back and take Minnowfrost's kits far away, far away from anywhere he knew. He'd find them a home, find them a queen who could take care of them, and he'd leave. He'd go further than his paws could take him until he died of exhaustion, suffering the same fate he'd bestowed upon all those cats. *This is reality, this is what you've done. Minnowfrost doesn't love you, you're no longer RiverClan's deputy, and you're cold blooded murderer. This is what you've done, this is who you really are, Pebblescar. This is reality.*

He halted and broke down into a mound of sorrow, wailing to the skies for forgiveness. Tears streamed down his face as he threw up shriek after shriek, his reality tumbling down before him. He took off the mask he'd been hiding behind, came out from the suit he'd

covered himself with. He cried out for help, yowled for some cat to save him, but no-cat appeared. Pebblescar was alone.

Pawsteps thundered behind him, a chorus of throbbing ground and raised heartbeats bounding straight towards him. A grey shape, a battered soul, those same sparking hazel eyes. Troutstar's claws scrabbled at the ground as he pressed towards Pebblescar, an expression of pure hatred spitting from his lungs. He staggered to his paws, tears trickling down his cheeks as he came face to face with the cat he'd murdered minutes ago.

"You're dead!" he howled, readying himself from an unwanted battle.

"I've still got one life left. I saved it just for you," Troutstar yowled, launching himself at Pebblescar.

"No! I don't want to fight you anymore Troutstar, I don't want to kill anymore!" he wailed as the elder cat scratched at him ruthlessly.

"Tough, Pebblescar! Kill or be killed, your choice!"

I don't want to kill, but I don't have a choice either. Troutstar must die.

Pebblescar heaved the cat off and pushed him to the ground, unsheathing his claws and striking his neck almost immediately. It was the fastest way he knew, but the least noble. Pebblescar had no dignity left.

"I'm sorry for all I've done to you. Please, forgive me?" he begged, Troutstar's final life draining away. He'd had no time to put up a fight, but it seemed Pebblescar had found his power beneath his woe.

"F-forgive you?" Troutstar spluttered. "I'd," he broke into a bloody coughing fit. "I'd rather die!"

Pebblescar screeched as Troutstar choked on his own blood, his body jerking as his life seeped away once again. He wheezed profusely, before lying limp. His mouth gaped as blood trickled from it, his paws stretching out and stiffening, and those sparking hazel eyes clouded over, lifeless. Troutstar was dead, and

Pebblescar screeched in agonising victory.

As a light drizzle showered Pebblescar as he screamed over Troutstar's body, a single cloud opened from the thick mob of dreary scenery. Pushing against the case in which it lied in, a starless figure rose from the stiffened body, catching Pebblescar's attention. A sharply defined silver soul stood beside its body, staring down sadly at what it had to leave behind.

"Troutstar? I'm sorry," Pebblescar whispered emotionally, his eyes bloodshot.

The spirit leaned forward and pressed his nose against Pebblescar's ear, murmuring quietly.

"Forgive you? I'd rather die."

Wandering forward and swishing his tail, his gaze fixed on the gaping hole in the sky. He flicked his whiskers contently, before staring back at Pebblescar and scowling.

"Pebblescar... Rot, Pebblescar, rot in flames."

~ Final chapter written by Hazel, stay tuned for the Epilogue coming soon. I'm honoured to have written such a dramatic chapter in a much loved story, and I hoped you all liked it ~

Epilogue

The only sound that was ringing in the murderer's ears was his own pulse; it was so loud and thundering that each beat made him stumble, creating an awkward gait along the shore of the river. His eyes darkened by a growing rage, the former deputy collapsed onto the pebble beach, feeling each and every of the little stones that he was named for. Cold water lapped at his paws, bringing an icy chill that made his legs shake. Fur now partly drenched, he dragged himself to his paws again, the metallic tang of blood dancing on his tongue.

Pebblescar pushed his paws forward, digging his claws into the mud and pulling himself forward. The pangs of exhaustion seemed like too much for him to handle. He was breathing heavily, a jolt of pain arching through his body with each inhale and a slight hiss escaping his lungs. The tom wheezed, feeling the blood trickle out of his multiple wounds as he lay on a steep incline. The soil beneath him was starting to crumble away as water from above started to patter against his pelt.

"Take me away from this. . ." A hoarse whisper drifted out of his muzzle, broadcasting his weakness across the area. Pebblescar realized with a jolt that he was a broken cat. A murderer, a pointless murderer who didn't understand that Minnowfrost wanted to be left alone.

And with these thoughts brokenly lingering in his broken mind, the dark gray tom wept. He wept for Cinderclaw, who had started a chain of killing and had already started to fade from the memory of the forest. He wept for Oakfire, who had only died because she knew truth. He wept for Samuel, who didn't belong in this whole mess in the first place. He wept for the rogue in the battle and Gartooth and Reedstorm and now the cat he had aspired to take the place of.

"I'm a murderer," Pebblescar meowed softly, letting the candor consume his mind. The honesty of his words ate away at his sanity,

exposing the true cat that was hidden beneath. "I'm a murderer!" Anger burned in his belly, but the dark gray tom was having none of it. He sat up gently, letting the scratches on his side adjust to the new position. Soon fury topped pain and he was standing, feeling the lightning bolts of hurt race up and down his sides.

"I don't need to deny it," he snarled, spinning around his paws. "I need to *embrace* it."

~~~

Pebblekit muttered in his sleep, restlessly turning over. His silver pelt was streaked with mud, and the small den that Pebblescar had made was quickly becoming damp from the rain. He nudged his brother, who was snoring loudly. "Reedkit," he mewed. "Wake up!"

The dark brown tom opened his eyes, stretching his jaw into a yawn. "What do you want?" he replied in his squeaky, high-pitched voice "I'm just tryin' to sleep!"

"Pebblescar's gone." Urgency drove his meow.

"So?"

Pebblekit glanced furtively out of the small den, anxiously peering through the fronds of the fern. "If he's gone for a lot longer, then we can sneak away!" Now Rainkit was awake, sitting in the far corner of the den and kneading on the moss of her soaked nest.

The silver she-kit opened her muzzle to speak. "Why would we want to sneak away?" she asked softly, recognizing Pebblekit's stealth and keeping her words quiet. "Pebblescar saved us from ThunderClan, when they invaded the camp!" Rainkit believed her words, and Reedkit just wanted to go back to sleep, but the third kin of Minnowfrost wasn't going to go without questioning every step of the way.

"It was *ShadowClan* that invaded the camp, don't you have a brain?" Reedkit snorted, puffing out his fur as he paced around the den. "Or. . . or was it?" His words trailed in pitch, climbing the scale in a questioning movement.
~~~

"That's the point! Pebblescar can't keep his story straight," Pebblekit meowed brightly, unsheathing his claws and dragging them across the muddy ground. Beneath his growing anger was happiness that his littermates could recognize the truth. "He's lying to us. . . there was no strange scent in camp. There wasn't even a RiverClan cat awake when we were 'saved'."

Rainkit's eyes widened. "But—but why would he lie?" she cried out in anguish, unsheathing her claws as well.

The gray-pelted tom was going to answer when a familiar scent drifted into the den. A sharp upwind was revealing the presence of the one cat that these kits didn't want to see. Pebblekit immediately balled up, letting his body go limp against the moss. With one eye closed, he watched as Reedkit laid back down and Rainkit settled into her nest. The kits all breathed out as Pebblescar entered the den.

This time, however, something was different. The tom's pelt was drenched in a thick, red liquid that smelled sharply of a RiverClan cat. Pebblescar's eyes were stretched wide with anxiety, yet narrowed just *slightly* so that his true rage could boil through. The kits could feel the anger pouring off of him in thick, heated waves, and they all were afraid.

"Hello," Pebblescar panted, feigning tiredness. "I—I was attacked by a ShadowClan cat! I was trying to save Troutstar, he's the—the leader of RiverClan, and I had to fight a shadowed tom twice my size!" Pebblekit could tell that the older warrior was lying. His words were shaky, and he paused often to reconsider the story. But he still stayed silent, now looking upward at the bloody tom with wide eyes.

"I thought ThunderClan invaded the camp," piped Rainkit, giving a meaningful glance to her brothers.

Pebblescar froze for a heartbeat, but he let out a breath and continued with his fable. "Yes, they did. Both the Clans, uh, teamed up to take over the territory."

"What about the last Clan?" asked Reedkit, tilting his head to the

side slightly. "Breeze. . . Clan?" For once, Pebblekit was glad that his littermate was too dumb to remember anything, and, as a result, diverted the topic away from one that could lead to the murderer's hostility.

"WindClan," corrected Pebblescar, relieved to discuss a familiar topic. "They don't want to get involved with anything."

Reedkit nodded. "I guess. . . I guess that makes sense," the dark brown tom meowed, letting a sigh infect his voice. "But if I was a WindClan leader or deputy or warrior or apprentice, I would want ta' help RiverClan, 'cause we're the best Clan." The younger kit rolled his eyes at his brother.

Pebblescar merely nodded and settled into his corner of the den, cleaning the blood out of his pelt. Rainkit slowly padded toward him, her ears folded flat against her skull and muzzle extended toward him. She swiped her tongue across his pelt, flinching back as if expecting a violent reaction. The dark gray tom stayed silent, and the kit continued the groom the parts of his flank that she could reach.

Reedkit shared a glance with his brother; they both stayed seated, watching this event with mixed expressions. Rainkit's hazel eyes were wide with fear, but Pebblescar payed no attention to her. He was consumed in licking his paw, then drawing it over his face and staring at the bright red color that had stained his fur. Each time he did so, he would shudder slightly, close his eyes, and repeat.

Eventually, when enough progress was made, Pebblescar closed his eyes and laid down. Rainkit danced out from underneath him, her eyes wide from nearly being crushed.

"I'm going to go to sleep," the tom meowed. "I suggest you do the same." His tone was enforcing, not welcoming, and the kits reluctantly retreated to their respective corners of the den.

~~~

Pebblescar awoke to twelve pairs of claws digging into his flanks. Letting out a yowl, he struggled to stand, but sleepiness kept him
~~~

from moving. A razor-sharp pair of fangs sunk into his neck. Pain danced throughout his body, keeping every nerve alive in a fire of hurt. He tried to move again, paws slowly shifting upwards and trying to bat off the minuscule attackers.

"Stay down or I'll bite you again!" one of the cats shouted loudly. Pebblescar realized that it was Pebblekit, his claws digging into his chest, sitting just above his head.

He opened his eyes and met the gaze of the tom who was going to kill him. The tom who he had stolen and raised and was now going to kill him."What—what are you doing?" the dark gray tom whimpered, feeling the other two kits making small lacerations across his pelt. Blood was running down the side of his neck, pooling below him and soaking into the green moss.

Pebblekit snorted, anger clouding his mew. "We're killing you," he spat. "You stole us, and you killed the cats who were supposed to take us."

It's going to be alright. . . I can leave this reality and return to the true world, where my *Rainkit and Grasskit and Mudkit are all waiting for me.* A haunting smile lit his green eyes. "Goodbye, Pebblekit," he meowed. There was no reply, and as his vision faded to blackness, Pebblescar realized something.

There was no other world. He had just died, and there was nowhere to go. Instead of opening his eyes to the roof of the warrior's den, Pebblescar opened them to the bleakness of the Dark Forest.

꒰ Final chapter brought to you by Rio! I'm sad to see this book end, but this isn't the end of Pebblescar - he will be featured in *Welcome to The Dark Forest,* a spoof where Pebblescar gives a tour of the Dark Forest. ꒱